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# MERELY MARY ANN

Comedy in Four Acts

ADAPTED BY

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

FROM HIS STORY OF THE SAME NAME

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*Act of March 4, 1909.*

# MERELY MARY ANN

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## MEN

LANCELOT (a Composer)  
PETER (in Business)  
HERR BRAHMSON (a Music Publisher)  
REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (a Country Vicar)  
O'GORMAN ( a Journalist)  
JIM BLAYDES (a Medical Student)  
LORD VALENTINE (of the Automobile Club)

## WOMEN

MRS. LEADBATTER (a Lodging-house Keeper)  
ROSIE (her daughter)  
THE SISTERS TRIPPET (KITTY AND POLLY, Music Hall Dancers)  
LADY CHELMER a Poor Peeress)  
CAROLINE, COUNTESS OF FOXWELL (her friend)  
THE HON. MRS. FITZGEORGE (in Society)  
LADY GLYNN (of the Smart Set)  
LADY GLADYS VALENTINE (the Countess's daughter)  
ROWENA FITZGEORGE (Mrs. Fitzgeorge's daughter)  
MARY ANN (merely)

## CREATURES

DICK (a Canary)  
HOWARD (a Butler)



**ACT I**

**Hall of Mrs. Leadbatter's Lodging house in South London.**

**ACT II**

**Lancelot's Bed-Sitting Room.**

**ACT III**

**The Same.**

**ACT IV**

**Drawing-room of Mead Manor Hall.**

**A month between Act I and II ; a week between Act II and III.  
Six years between Act III and IV.**

# MERELY MARY ANN

## ACT I

*The SCENE represents the hall of MRS. LEADBATTER's lodging house. The hall door is R., with letter box and door mat. There is also a window in this wall. There are two hall chairs, one up stage R. and another down stage R., a hat rack and umbrella stand—these two latter furnished with sundry coats and hats of all colours, sticks and umbrellas of all shapes. On the hall table stand five bedroom candlesticks with matches, three little heaps of letters, postcards and newspapers, and a large clothes brush. Gaudy oleographs on passage wall. The dining-room door is R.C. Carpeted stairs lead to LANCLOUT's door, L., with a little landing, both visible ere the stairs turn. Before these stairs goes the passage leading past the hall bench to the kitchen and parlour doors L. The gas is burning in the hall lamp, but rather dimly, with suggestion of lateness and economy. The stage is empty. The wind and rain are heard swishing outside. After a while a latchkey is heard to adjust itself in the lock, the door opens and O'GORMAN, a pock-marked, good-humoured, rather seedy journalist, stands half in and half out, his head turning towards an unseen driver, his lowered umbrella dripping.*

O'GORMAN (to unseen CABMAN, who is heard growling and grumbling hoarsely in reply throughout this speech). What do I call that? I call it quite enough for three-quarters of a mile. Eh? It's a wet night. Pwhat else would I be taking a cab for, begorra? Pwhat's that? I must give you sixpence more? Needs must when the devil drives, eh? Is that it? No, devil take me, don't you try swearing at me, because I'm a journalist and can bate you at it. Sacré-bleu, Donner-Blitzen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hellespont! (*Enters and bangs door.*) Mother in heaven! Pwhat a blessing to get the paper to bed! (*Yawns, puts wet umbrella in stand, sings.*)

“Kiss me good-night, dear love.  
Drame of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned—”

Bad luck to it! Shall I never get the tune out of my head? It's as catching as 'flu, and I've got it bad. Devil take Keeley Lesterre

and his "Good-night and Good-bye." Any letters? (*Takes his pile.*) Ah, from Nancy, the darlint.

"Drame of the old delight!"

There I go again! I'm as bad as a barrel organ. (*Strikes match, lights his candle, and begins to walk upstairs.*)

(*MRS. LEADBATTER'S voice, coming from kitchen, singing softly in outrageous Cockney accent.*)

"Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above."

(*Enter MRS. LEADBATTER L. She is stout, slipshod and frowsy, and carries a candlestick.*)

O'GORMAN (*in unconscious duet with MRS. LEADBATTER*).

"Kiss me, dear love, good-night."

(*Turns.*) Eh?

(*Embarrassed pause; both holding candlesticks high to see each other, he half-way upstairs, she at bottom.*)

Ah, a nasty night, Mrs. Leadbatter.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*at L.C.*). Yes, Mr. O'Gorman, I do 'ope all the gents 'ave shut their windows. If I shut them, they say there's not henough hair, and if I leaves them open they say there's too much water.

O'GORMAN. I dare say we lead you the divil of a life between us all. You must feel as if you had seven husbands to mother, each more unreasonable than the other six.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, no, no. (*Shaking head.*) Seven lodgers is child's play to one 'usband. And I've buried two.

O'GORMAN. The divil admire you! (*Mounting further.*) Pleasant drames!

MRS. LEADBATTER. Same to you, Mr. O'Gorman. (*Crosses towards table up R.*)

O'GORMAN (*hums*).

"Drame of the old delight."

(*Turns.*) Och, by the way, Mrs. Leadbatter, don't forget to take in my paper for me in the morning—the *Sunday Sledgehammer*, you know.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*back again a little*). Yes, sir, though I can't stomach newspapers coming out on Sunday. I may be a hignorant person who can't read them, but I do know Sunday is for rest.

O'GORMAN. Sure, it's right you are, and I shan't get up till Monday afternoon.

(*Both laugh.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER Well, sir, I 'opes it will be forgiven me on 'igh.

O'GORMAN. Don't worry about getting into Heaven. I'll give ye a press ticket. Good night. (*Disappears—heard singing*)

"Kiss me good-night, dear love."

MRS. LEADBATTER (*sings*).

"Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above——"

Goodness me, these wet humbrellas will be the ruin of my humbrella stand—— (*Puts candle on hall table, and takes O'GORMAN'S humbrella towards the kitchen. A double rat-tat at the street door.*) What can that be at this hour? (*Calls down to kitchen.*) Mary Ann! Mary Ann! Don't you hear a knock? Drat that girl. When she's wanted in the kitchen she's in the hattie, and when the droring-room bell rings, she's in the coal 'ole. (*Rat-tat.*) All right, all right, don't be so himpatient! You ain't one of my 'usbands come back. (*Shuffles to door and half opens it.*)

A MESSENGER BOY'S voice. Mr. Lancelot!

MRS. LEADBATTER. He's hout, and 'igh time 'e was hin. (*Looking at coats on hall rack.*)

A MESSENGER BOY'S voice. Sign, please.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Bother Mr. Lancelot. Folks ought not to be worried at such hours. Past eleven, and my 'and's gone to sleep. (*Calls towards lower regions.*) Rosie!

ROSIE (*from parlour*). Yes, Ma—I'm busy.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, you're always such a busy bee. Come 'ere and sign. (*Moves over a little R.*)

ROSIE. Oh, bother!

(MESSENGER BOY heard whistling, "Kiss me good-night, dear love," etc.)

(ROSIE enters from parlour door, holding pen and papers. ROSIE is of the barmaid type; coarse beauty, over-dressed, over-good-looking, flaxen-haired. She speaks in a pretentiously genteel manner.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. It's for that Mr. Lancelot.

ROSIE. Oh! (*Quickens her pace, signs, receives letter and places it on hall table.*)

(MRS. LEADBATTER closes the door and drops into a hall chair, down R. The whistling ceases.)

MRS. LEADBATTER. You oughtn't to stay hup so late a-readin' them love-tales.

ROSIE (*coming down R.C.*). Oh, Ma! Why, I was doing the bills for the week, before going to uncle's.

MRS. LEADBATTER. But the week hain't finished. There might be more breakages—if we've a bit of luck. I 'ope you've charged the third floor front with the jug 'e cracked.

ROSIE (*examining the bill with a guilty air*). Is—is it cracked?

MRS. LEADBATTER (*springs up*). Yes, and you as well—you'll be telling me next you 'aven't put heightenpence hextra for the 'ot supper of the second floor back.

ROSIE (*consulting bill*). Did he have it hot?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, and you'll 'ave it 'ot. (*Advances threateningly. ROSIE backs away from her.*) Where's the use of your grand heddication? Hall you do is to sprawl on sofas and snivel over story books. There's no henergy about the gals nowa-days. Why, when I was your hage I was a widow. You 'aven't forgotten to charge Mr. Lancelot for keeping the gas burning all Thursday night, now 'ave you?

ROSIE (L.C.). Oh, Mr. Lancelot wouldn't like that—his gas is inclusive.

MRS. LEADBATTER (R.C.). Hinclusive? Yes, all day, not all night. It's henough we throw in London fogs—that's hinclusive henough. Besides, Mr. Lancelot howes me so much already 'e won't mind howing me another shilling. He's more worrit than hall the lodgers put together, what with his pianner busting out any moment like a barrel-organ.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma! Mr. Lancelot plays like an angel.

MRS. LEADBATTER. I never 'eard as hangels could play the pianner. 'Arps is their hinstrument. But you're hall the same, you gals. Crazy over a good-looking young man. Wait till you're a widow—you'll know better. Has for Mary Ann, she broke the blue gravy dish through 'urrying to answer 'is bell.

ROSIE (*tossing her head—moving down L.*). I don't think you ought to class me with Mary Ann!

MRS. LEADBATTER (R.C.). 'Eaven forbid. Hall I say is you're hall alike. Ah, there she is at last.

(*MARY ANN in a patched print dress and a dirty apron has appeared on the landing at head of stairs, carrying in her apron a motley pile of men's dirty boots of every shape and size. She is a slim, pretty, almost poetic figure, despite the smut or two on her face, and her wan, under-fed look. During the following scene, until she speaks, Rosie busies herself with making out bills, using the left wall as a backing.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Mary Ann!

MARY ANN. Yes'm. (*Descending.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (R.C.). Have all them boots gone to bed?

MARY ANN. Yes'm. (*Descending.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*turns to hall table.*) Ah, yes—only five candle-sticks. No ladies' shoes?

MARY ANN. No, mum—the Sisters Trippet ain't home from the theatre.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The theayter. Ain't I told you often enough?

MARY ANN (C.). The theayter.

MRS. LEADBATTER. And who else is hout besides Mr. Lancelot ?

MARY ANN. The young man from the hospital.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The 'Orspital! You country booby!

MARY ANN. The 'Orspital.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, you can wait to turn out the gas and lock up. Rosie and me is going to bed. (*Takes candle from table.*)

MARY ANN (C.). Yes'm. (*Gapes.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't stand opening your mouth like a pillar box.

(*MARY ANN closes her mouth hastily.*)

(*Moving down R.C., with a touch of kindness.*) You needn't do the boots to-night.

MARY ANN. Please, mum, I don't mind, if I might do them upstairs in my bedroom.

MRS. LEADBATTER. What! Are you afraid of the black-beetles ?

MARY ANN. No, mum, but I can see the moon.

MRS. LEADBATTER (R.C.). The moon! So that's what you've been hup to hall this while—moonning the precious hours away.

MARY ANN. No, mum, the rain did hide the moon, but it's giving over now, and the stars are coming out.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The stars! What next? Well, I never.

ROSIE (L.). It's all moonshine, Ma, she just wants to get with her canary.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, that reminds me. I do 'ope, Mary Ann, you'll keep that 'orrid bird of yours quiet; it quite broke up my rest last night.

MARY ANN. I'm so sorry, mum. I can't make out why he did sing—all in the dark and cold. I'll talk to he.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Not to 'ee, silly. To hit.

MARY ANN. To hit.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Come along, Rosie.

(*ROSIE crosses up to table, and looks over letters, holding them up to light.*)

What a worrit to heddiccate you. I'll never take a country gal again. Well, go and talk to your blessed bird. (*Going to stairs.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, thank you, mum. I'll get the blacking brushes. (*Pours out boots in passage and hastens towards kitchen.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And, Mary Ann!

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You won't gawk at your moon and forget my gas. (*Going upstairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, mum.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*goes one step higher.*) And see that the wet humbrellas don't spile me humbrella stand.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*some stairs higher*). And be hup sharp to take in the milk can—these harea thieves is gettin' bold as brass.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

(*ROSIE ascends stairs.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*on landing*). And don't forget to-morrow's the Lord's day, and the third floor back must be waked for hearly church.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

ROSIE (*on the landing*). And, Mary Ann! I shan't be here to-morrow, so you'll wait on the Sisters Trippet.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*invisible*). Oh, and get the *Sunday Sledge-ammer* when you 'ear the newsboy.

MARY ANN. Yes'm.

(*A pause. Silence. The wind heard again, but not the rain. Then the noise of JIM BLAYDES fumbling outside the hall door.*)

JIM (*invisible, from outside*). Dash that keyhole! Where has it—hic!—got to?

(*Yawning—long fumbling; impatient shaking; at last a timid knock. MARY ANN runs up gaping, with the blacking brushes in her hand, and opens the door. JIM BLAYDES enters, a little but not too much the worse for liquor, in a mackintosh, a gaudy tie, and a medical student air.*)

Sorry to trouble you—been cutting up corpses in the hospital. (*Crosses up to table.*)

MARY ANN (*to herself*). Oh dear! he can't say 'orspital. (*Kindly.*) I'm going up, sir, you can lean on me.

JIM. Thank you—not without my letters. (*Staggers slightly.*) Makes nerves unsteady—cutting up corpses—real live corpses. (*Takes his two letters.*) That is two letters, isn't it, Mary Ann? (*With morbid nervous jocularly.*) One, two, eh?

MARY ANN (*reassuringly*). Yes, sir. (*Lights his candle and gives it to him.*)

JIM (*at o. joyously*). I'm all right. (*Takes candle.*) I'm all right—don't want to lean on you— (*Sings.*)

"My spirit is summoned above—"

(*Catches sight of medley of dirty boots, and covers eyes with hand, then reassures himself.*) I'm all right, I'm all right, that's only one—dirty pair of boots, isn't it, Mary Ann? Only one pair of boots, eh?

MARY ANN (*at R.O.*). I wish it was, sir. (*Crosses to him and helps him upstairs.*)

(*He sings "Kiss me good-night."*)

(*Noise of cab driving up, and LANCELOT'S voice calls out, "Whoa there!" After a pause a latchkey is heard in lock, door half opens*

and LANCELOT is seen, a tall, handsome young man in rough artistic tweeds, with artistic hair and fingers.)

LANCELOT. Well, good night, Peter. Glad we met again. So good of you to give me a lift. Good night.

(Enter LANCELOT with umbrella. PETER half pushing in behind him. PETER in evening dress—elegant opera cape, opera hat—short, squat, the Sancho Panza to LANCELOT's Don Quixote.)

PETER. No, not good night, Lancelot. I've got heaps more to yarn about—after all these years.

LANCELOT. I'm sorry I can't ask you in. I've nowhere to receive visitors.

PETER. Nowhere to receive visitors? What the devil are you making such a fuss about?

LANCELOT. Hush! Everybody's asleep.

PETER. Rot! (*Forces himself in.*) Why, here's a chair. (*Plumps into hall chair below door.*) And a better one than we had in our German garret. (*Closes opera hat with a decisive snap.*)

LANCELOT (*flapping his hat angrily on a peg*). Our garret at Leipsic was sanctified by music, by inspiration. All around one heard violins, pianos, harps, fresh young singing voices, everywhere was the atmosphere of art.

PETER. And garlic.

LANCELOT. Better than the boiled cabbage of British apartments. Pah! Stale and heavy as that British opera to-night. And here's a miserable light. (*Angrily turns hall lamp much higher.*) Ach Himmel, what a country! (*Digs his umbrella savagely into the stand.*) And look there! (*Indicates MARY ANN, who just appears on landing above and is descending.*) Look at that creature with her smuts, and think of the rosy-faced Fräuleins of the Fatherland!

PETER (*down R., rising, looking*). I think she's rather pretty.

LANCELOT (*up R.C.*). That's what you said of to-night's opera, you old stall-fed ox. But we didn't think so in the gallery, I can tell you. We just booted.

PETER. Sounds as if you were the oxen. You've got German measles. Let me help you off with your coat. (*Takes LANCELOT's coat and hangs it on rack.*) (*LANCELOT to MARY ANN, who has come to a standstill at the foot of the stairs, and is staring awestruck at the extravagantly burning gas*). Well, Polly, Betsey, Jane, or whatever your name may be, what are you waiting for?

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). Please, sir, to fasten up and turn out that gas.

LANCELOT (*at R.C., crossly*). Well, you can't just yet.

PETER (*crossing down L.—kindly*). All right, my child, I'll see he does it.



MARY ANN. Oh, don't, please, sir, there's the ladies——

PETER. Ah, ladies live here too?

MARY ANN (at c.). Yessir, very grand ladies. The Sisters Trippet from the theatre—I mean theaytre.

PETER. No, you don't, you mean the music hall. They're not really sisters, are they?

LANCELOT (grimly). Step-dance sisters! You see what I've come to. (*Stumbles against boots.*) And what in the name of England, home and beauty, are these beastly boots doing! (*Kicks them.*)

MARY ANN (at c.). Please, sir, I'm taking them up to clean. (*Gathers them up in apron.*)

LANCELOT (R.C.). Well, hurry up, and clean your face too, while you are about it.

PETER (at L.C., *bustling to pick up a remote boot and put it in MARY ANN's lap*). There you are, Polly. Is that your name?

MARY ANN. No, sir. Mary Ann.

PETER. Mary Ann what?

MARY ANN. Mary Ann; that's all, sir.

PETER. Merely Mary Ann?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT (*dropping on chair R.*). Ah, Peter, when in the ecstasy of composition we would deem ourselves Gods, these are the Hebes a mocking fate sends up with our tea.

(MARY ANN starts to go.)

By the way, Mary Ann, I'm hiring a better piano—it's coming in on Monday—a grand piano—I suppose it will have to come up through the window—these staircases are so beastly narrow. Do you never have a stout lodger, I wonder?

MARY ANN (up c.). Oh, yes, sir. Some time ago we had quite a fat gentleman.

LANCELOT (at R.). Ah! And did he go up through the window by a pulley?

MARY ANN. No, sir. He lived on the ground floor.

PETER (L.). Ha! Ha! Ha!

LANCELOT (*getting up and coming towards MARY ANN*). Shut up, you hyena, you'll wake up the house. Anyhow, you know what a piano is; I suppose you'd know it from a kangaroo?

MARY ANN (c.). Yes, sir. A kangaroo could get upstairs of itself.

PETER. Ha! Ha!

LANCELOT (*disconcerted*). Oh, you've seen a kangaroo, have you?

MARY ANN. Oh, yes, sir, it came to the village fair in a circus. A beastly with the jumps.

LANCELOT. Oh, then, since you know so much, perhaps you can play the piano too?

MARY ANN (*at c.—blushing and hanging her head*). No, sir, missus never showed me how to do that.

LANCELOT (*at R.C.*). Ha! Ha! Ha! This is a real original. But you would be willing to play——?

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). Please, sir, it does play a little when I dust it.

PETER (*at L.C.*). Oh, let the child go to bed. Good night, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN. Good night, sir. (*Ascends with the boots.*)

LANCELOT. Here! Put out the whisky and a couple of glasses in my room as you go up.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

(*Hastens up to his room's door and exit through it.*)

PETER (*crossing over to LANCELOT*). I say, Lancelot, adversity doesn't seem to agree with you. You quite made that poor child's cheeks wet.

LANCELOT. It will wash away her smuts. Did you see her hands—black and red like lobsters? Ugh! Why doesn't she wear gloves? (*Turns towards table.*)

PETER. Wear gloves! You are too funny, Lancelot. Ah, how you aristocrats do hate the poor! No wonder there are French Revolutions.

LANCELOT. Hallo! (*Catches sight of a letter.*) Confound Mary Ann. Here's an express letter waiting all this time.

PETER. Oh, no hurry. It's only from me.

LANCELOT. From you?

PETER. Yes, I forgot to post it till after the opera, so I got a messenger boy, little thinking I should walk right into you the moment after. Life is too funny. After hunting for you for years, I stumble on your address this morning at Brahmsen's, and to-night——

LANCELOT. Brahmsen's? The music publisher? What were you doing there? You said you'd chucked music!

PETER (*moving to L.C., uneasy*). Oh—I—you see he's a chum of mine. And so he was telling me——

LANCELOT (*at R.C.*). He was *telling* you? Is he visible? Does he really exist? Has he a body?

PETER. Ha! Ha! Has Brahmsen a body? I should say he has; the kind that would have to come up through the window by a pulley.

LANCELOT. Never once have I been able to get at him—such a prickly hedge of clerks.

PETER. Ha! Ha! But your abusive letters have got at him—he says he thinks you have hurled at him even more abuse than manuscripts.

MARY ANN (*passing out of LANCELOT's room on upward way*). I've put the whisky out, sir.

(*Exit upstairs.*)

LANCELOT. But Brahmsen doesn't know my real name—only Mr. Lancelot. How did you get to know it was I?

PETER. By the good music and the bad language.

LANCELOT. Then why doesn't he publish it?

PETER. The bad language?

LANCELOT. Go to blazes! (*Moves to down R., begins to tear open letter.*)

PETER (*anxiously*). No, no. (*Following over a little.*) No need to read it now—wait till I've gone.

LANCELOT. And did he tell you about my sonata that he's gone and lost?

PETER. Brahmsen never loses, not even money.

LANCELOT. Then why won't he publish it?

PETER. I just told you—he never loses money. Don't swear—you ought to love him. He's a German. I prefer the Scotch—and I'm going to get it.

(*Goes towards the stairs, ascends a couple noisily.*)

LANCELOT (*moving up stage*). Hush! People are asleep.

PETER. Not so many stairs as at Leipsic, old man, nicht wahr?

LANCELOT. No, mein lieber, there were ninety-seven.

PETER. Ninety-six; I used to count them.

LANCELOT. Ninety-seven. I remember it rhymed with Heaven.

PETER (*turning and looking down*). I hope you've forgiven me, lieber Lancelot, for my fall from Heaven.

LANCELOT. I've nothing to forgive. (*Takes up his candle.*) If you chose to chuck up music and go into business, that's your own affair.

PETER (*pleadingly*). Most of us do it sooner or later.

LANCELOT. You're right—look at to-night's opera. That chap's gone into business with a vengeance. And I did think once he might be the Saviour of British Music. (*Prepares to strike a match—it goes out.*)

PETER. Never mind—the place is open for you.

LANCELOT (*strikes a match*). Bah, the British public is not worth writing for! Keeley Lesterre is all they're fit for. (*Mockingly and mincingly.*)

“Kiss me, dear love, good night,  
Dream of the old delight.”

Ugh! It's like treacle. (*His match goes out—he strikes another.*)

PETER. There are worse things than treacle. To tell the truth, I am—(*checks himself*) an admirer of Keeley Lesterre.

LANCELOT (*lighting his candle*). I see you are fast qualifying for a musical critic.

(*Street door opens with a dash, and LANCELOT'S candle is blown out by the entry of the SISTERS TRIPPET, who speak rapidly as they come in, scarcely noticing LANCELOT'S exclamation which follows.*)

LANCELOT. The devil!

POLLY. She didn't get a hand.

KITTY. She can't dance for nuts.

POLLY. She'll be all right for the provs.

KITTY. And wanted to be starred bigger than us.

POLLY. Cheek!

KITTY AND POLLY (*they have been throwing off cloaks and revealing elaborate beauties and toilettes and suggesting anything but sisterhood. Now speaking in different keys as they perceive they've blown out LANCELOT's light*). Awfully sorry.

(LANCELOT turns his back rudely on them and fumbles nervously at the letter, trying to open it. PETER, half-way up the stairs, turns and looks at newcomers.)

POLLY. Lovely night after the rain. (*Repeats.*) Isn't it a lovely night after the rain? (*Crosses up to table.*)

(LANCELOT grunts.)

A postcard for you, Kitty!

KITTY (*lighting candle*). Only a measly postcard? Oh, Polly, we forgot to buy the cigarettes. (*Comes down R.C.*)

POLLY (C.). Good Lord! And everything's shut.

PETER. Can I oblige you? (*Descends stairs, crosses to L.C.—takes out cigarette-case.*) I have lots.

(LANCELOT stamps his foot.)

KITTY AND POLLY. Thanks, awfully.

KITTY (R.C.). You living here?

PETER (L.C.). No. Just seeing my friend.

POLLY (C.—*coquettishly*). I'm so sorry.

PETER. So am I.

(LANCELOT moves towards L., tears at letter savagely. The SISTERS light their candle. KITTY lights LANCELOT's.)

KITTY. I've lit your candle again.

(LANCELOT does not reply. The SISTERS ascend.)

KITTY (*looking back—to PETER*). I wish you'd get your pal to write us music for a dance.

LANCELOT (*down L.—cursing deeply*). God forbid!

POLLY. For money, not for love.

KITTY. We ain't mean—we'd pay a guinea.

LANCELOT (*grinding his teeth*). Donner und Blitzen!

KITTY AND POLLY (*up the stairs*). Good night.

PETER (R.C.). Good night.

KITTY (*calls down to PETER*). I say, old fellow, you'd better put a poultice on your pal's head—take down the swelling. (*Leans*

*over balustrade, to LANCELOT, near kitchen door.)* O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo ?

*(SISTERS disappear laughing.)*

*(PETER throwing kisses up to them.)*

LANCELOT *(pausing with opened but unread letter)*. I'm ashamed of you, Peter.

PETER. What's up ? Can't I do a Christian kindness ?

LANCELOT. Christian kindness ! All they wanted was to flirt—they've got trunks of cigarettes—and all you wanted was to flirt.

PETER. All right—don't bite my head off—I'm not a monster of perfection like you.

LANCELOT. Bah ! Where's your self-respect ? *(Still growling, draws out cheque.)* What's this ? *(Peruses letter.)*

PETER. Oh, er—*(takes out his cigarette case, drops it nervously, picks it up, takes out cigarette, drops it, picks it up, tries to light it)*—the money you lent me.

LANCELOT *(looking up, hisses in white heat)*. How dare you !

PETER *(B.C., dropping the match)*. What ! Mustn't I smoke ?

LANCELOT *(L.C.)*. You may smoke in Hades, you confounded counter-jumper ! A cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds.

PETER *(apologetically)*. Hush ! Hush ! I've only added interest at five per cent.

LANCELOT. Interest ! That's the last straw ! Because I'm reduced to Trippet Sisters and Mary Anna, you—

PETER. It's your own money.

LANCELOT. Am I a moneylender ? I gave you the money.

PETER. You did, Lancelot—most magnificently. You paid for your old school-fellow's training at Leipsic when his commercial papa offered him an office stool or starvation. You were a baronet's son, I was a tea-merchant's, yet you—

LANCELOT *(graciously)*. Art is a republic.

PETER. Then let me be even with you. In those youthful days of revolt against our "stern parients," when you wouldn't go into the Church, and I wouldn't go into the City, everything was clouded in a magnificent mist. But now I see more straightly. Where's my self-respect, you ask. You rob me of it if you don't take my cheque. Since I did the prodigal son dodge, I am simply rolling in money.

LANCELOT. Roll on—what's that to me ? *(Tears cheque and strews it into a score of fragments.)*

PETER *(dolefully as he stoops)*. Oh, dear, more work for Mary Ann ! *(Crawls picking up pieces.)*

LANCELOT. And now you can just roll home—*(crosses to dining-room door and takes down whistle from it)*—I'll call a hansom. *(Opens hall door.)*

PETER. But see, I'm on my knees to you—I'm taking back my money—(*picks up pieces*)—every bit of it.

(LANCELOT remorselessly whistles for a cab. PETER jumps up and drags him in, struggling, half-laughing, half-serious.)

You're a blithering, bloated aristocrat; you're just wallowing in pride.

LANCELOT. Hush! You'll wake the house.

PETER. Beastly patrician pride. And this is my French Revolution. (*Forces him into chair below door R.*)

LANCELOT (*half angry—half laughing*). You bourgeois bully! You haven't lost your muscle since we wrestled in our German garret.

PETER. Beware then—or you'll be wiped out—— By the way—(*crosses to C.*)—how is your big brother, the baronet? Has he married an American heiress yet?

LANCELOT. Heaven forbid! (*Rising, hangs whistle on door, then comes down stage again.*) We marry a girl whose father has struck ile! Ugh!

PETER. Why not? The girl's polished with the oil.

LANCELOT. Reeking with it, you mean. No, Peter, in our family we marry ladies.

PETER. Yes, but what do you call a lady?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann!

(MARY ANN is seen on landing, holding candle, her face washed.)

MARY ANN. Yessir. I only came for to turn out that gas. (*Staring wistfully at its extravagant flare.*)

LANCELOT. My friend hasn't gone yet.

PETER. Hasn't come yet, you mean. (*Moves towards stairs.*) Let's have one drink for Leipsic and auld lang syne—and then I'll skedaddle. I know Mary Ann won't sleep till I'm off her mind, will you?

MARY ANN. No, sir, I promised missus.

LANCELOT. Well, come along, Peter. (*Takes candle from table.*)

(*They go up. As they mount, a passing chorus of male voices in the street, accompanied by a concertina, commences "Kiss me good-night, dear love." Start singing very low R., gradually louder and die away in distance L. LANCELOT makes a face.*)

Oh, these Saturday-night street ruffians!

PETER. They might be doing worse.

(*Exeunt into LANCELOT'S room. Street chorus is continued.*)

"Dream of the old delight,  
My spirit is summoned above,  
Kiss me, dear love, good-night."

*And when finished, re-starts, dying away in the distance. MARY ANN listens, emotionally entranced, humming chorus, puts her candle on*

*table, picks up remaining bits of cheque, lastly takes up the brush and vigorously brushes LANCELOT's coat as it hangs in the hall. LANCELOT and PETER are heard drinking, crying "Prosit," and winding up with "Gaudeamus Igitur." The joyous student-song mingles with the cress of the street-song. As they emerge, PETER comically finishes the song like an opera singer, but LANCELOT silences him abruptly by reminding him with a gesture that the house is asleep.)*

PETER. So that's a bargain—you'll dine with me next Tuesday. Happy thought. Why not invite Brahmsen to meet you?

LANCELOT (*angrily*). Damnable thought. If Brahmsen won't take my music on its merits, I'll have none of your sly underhand patronizing tricks; none of your d——d dodges (*pushing him half playfully down remaining stairs*), do you hear, Peter?

PETER (*jumping down R.C.*). Yes, I hear—but I'd rather hear your music. Even I couldn't induce Brahmsen to bring out new-fangled stuff like yours—so you needn't be alarmed. Lancelot, I'm afraid you're in for a terrible fight. And even genius doesn't always win. How are you to live?

LANCELOT. One can always die.

PETER. That seems such a waste of time—especially when there is that two hundred and fifty—yes, don't kick me. Good night, old chap. (*Opens his opera hat with a plop, and takes umbrella from stand.*)

LANCELOT. Good night, lieber Peter. (*Places candle on table. Puts hand on PETER's shoulder, as they move slowly towards the door, passing MARY ANN without noticing her.*) I forgive you for that cheque—you've brought me such pleasant memories of our dear old garret. I see the Heinstrasse and the quaint tall houses, and hear again the first whispers of fame and love—it's all flowing through my brain in fluttering chords and spring-like melodies.

PETER. Then write them down at once, old chap. Lebt wohl! (*Opens door and glides off.*)

LANCELOT. Auf Wiedersehen!

PETER. Auf Wiedersehen! (*Outside.*)

LANCELOT (*stands sentimentally at door looking out*). Lieber Peter!

(*Bell ready up R.*)

(*A longish pause—Silence—MARY ANN watching him lovingly. A church clock slowly booms twelve.*)

LANCELOT. Ah, midnight. (*Turns pensively. In surprise.*) Mary Ann!

MARY ANN (C.). Yessir.

LANCELOT (R.C.). I'm so sorry—I didn't mean to keep you waiting—you must be dying for bed. (*Going up stairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I could wait up for hours, if—— (*Flushes.*)

LANCELOT. If what, my child? (*Pauses on stairs and turns head.*)

MARY ANN (L.C.). If you was going to play the music you told Mr. Peter about.

LANCELOT (*blankly*). The music I told Peter——

MARY ANN. That's in your brain. The fluttering strings and springy tunes.

LANCELOT (*interested, laughing*). If I played it now?

MARY ANN (*moving to R.C.*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*coming to L.C.*). And how about your sleep?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, it's better than sleep.

LANCELOT. I'm afraid the rest of the house wouldn't think so.

MARY ANN. You could play very soft, sir.

LANCELOT. So you've got an ear.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. A pretty ear, too.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Ah, you know you're pretty.

MARY ANN. Yessir. The vicar of our village told me that was why Mrs. Leadbatter must take care of me.

LANCELOT. Ah, the village where the kangaroo came.

MARY ANN. Yessir. Mr. Smedge.

LANCELOT. I'm glad you're a country girl—I hope you went a-milking?

MARY ANN (*enthusiastically relapsing into her dialect*). Eessir! And I did drive the milk-cart, and I did ride on a pony to the second pasture to count the sheep and heifers.

LANCELOT. Then you are a farmer's daughter?

MARY ANN. Eessir. My feyther had only fower little fields, but we had a niceiah garden with plum trees and gillyflowers and roses.

LANCELOT. Better and better. The roses haven't quite faded yet. (*Strokes her cheeks.*) How old were you when you came to London?

MARY ANN (*puzzling it out*). I were eight years old when mother died, and thirteen when feyther died.

LANCELOT. And how old are you now?

MARY ANN. I—I don't know, sir. I'll ask missus.

LANCELOT. And whatever she tells you, you'll be.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Oh dear, what a funny little Topsy! (*Crosses her and moves to R.*)

MARY ANN. I'm not topsy-turvey, I haven't kept count.

LANCELOT (*turning to her*). What! No birthdays?

MARY ANN (L.C.). Only Miss Rosie's; I always do her work on her birthday.

LANCELOT. What a shame!

MARY ANN. Oh, it only comes once a year, sir.



LANCELOT. Like Christmas.

MARY ANN. Oh, no sir, not so heavy as Christmas. And last year I don't think Miss Rosie's birthday did come at all.

LANCELOT. Ah, she's taking a year off!

MARY ANN. Yessir.

*(Both laugh.)*

LANCELOT. But your own birthdays—

MARY ANN. There's no one to keep those, sir.

LANCELOT. Then you are quite alone in the world?

MARY ANN. No, sir. *(Moves up to him R.)* There's my canary. They sold everything when feyther died, but I did cry so the vicar's wife she did buy Dick back for me.

LANCELOT. But haven't you any brothers and sisters?

MARY ANN. Little Sally, she died. And my big brother Tom I never did see. Oh, but I mustn't mention his name, mother said.

LANCELOT. Mustn't mention his name? Why?

MARY ANN *(half weeping)*. He's so wicked. He wouldn't go to church.

LANCELOT. Dear me!

MARY ANN. No, sir—or if he did, mother said, he coughed so loud—all make-believe—that he had to be sent out. He led a bad life, sir, and now he's in America.

LANCELOT. Serve him right. Poor lonely little Mary Ann! *(Draws her towards him.)* I'm sorry I spoke so crossly to you before. There—there. *(Kisses her. She retreats shyly.)* Oh, don't run away. *(He takes her hands—then as he feels their roughness, makes a grimace and says)* I shall have to buy you a pair of gloves.

MARY ANN. Oh, sir! *(Then disappointed.)* But I never goes out!

LANCELOT. I never go out.

MARY ANN. I never go out.

LANCELOT. That doesn't matter. I want you to wear them indoors.

MARY ANN. But what'd missus say?

LANCELOT. Missus needn't see them. You shall only wear them when you come to me.

MARY ANN. Oh, thank you, sir, that will be grand!

LANCELOT *(holding her in his arms)*. And if there is anything else I can do to help a poor little girl—

MARY ANN. Oh, sir, if you would be so good! *(Breaks from his arms.)* Wait a moment, sir. *(Rushes up stairs two at a time.)*

LANCELOT. What the devil! *(Stares after her. Then with sudden transition.)* Good God! What have I done? *(Takes out handkerchief and wipes lips.)* To sink to a Mary Ann. Faugh! *(Rubs vigorously.)* I must have drunk too much whisky. *(Paces agitatedly.)* And I slanged Peter for talking to the Sisters Trippet . . . ! Whatever does she want me to do?

(MARY ANN rushes back, holding a large canary cage.)

MARY ANN. Please, sir, would you let my canary stay in your room?

LANCELOT (*amazed*). Your canary?

MARY ANN. Yessir. Missus don't like him in mine. And there's more air and sunshine in yours, and such a nice nail for the cage.

LANCELOT (*impatiently*). Oh, hang your canary!

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Hastens up to his room and exits through the door.*)

LANCELOT. A pretty mess I've got into! Already she's given me a keepsake. A keepsake from Mary Ann! Oh, Peter, Peter, why did you come and make me sentimental—and semi-sober! (*Wipes mouth nervously again.*)

MARY ANN (*re-enters, runs downstairs*). Please, sir, I'm so happy, and so is the canary.

LANCELOT (*sullenly*). I hope he won't chortle in his joy. (*Crosses to stairs.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I talked to he.

(LANCELOT turns saying "Eh?")

I mean to hit.

LANCELOT (*brusquely*). All right—good night.

(*Exit up stairs into room.*)

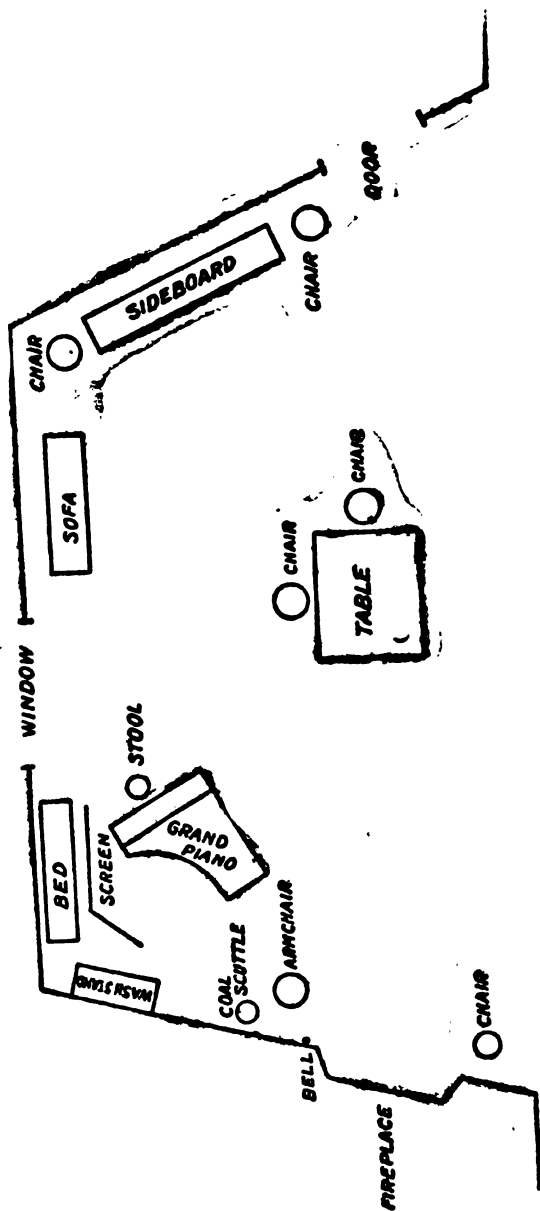
MARY ANN. Good night, sir. (*Watches him upstairs till he disappears, then begins humming happily*

"Kiss me good-night, dear love."

*She locks and bolts the door and puts up the chain. As she stands on chair to turn out gas, his door opens and his boots are thrown out with an angry crash, and the door is banged as with a curse. MARY ANN turns out hall lamp, slowly ascends the stairs, her candle making the one spot of light in the darkness. She stumbles against LANCELOT'S boots midway and kneels to pick them up.*

God bless you, Mr. Lancelot, and my canary!

ACTS 2 AND 3.  
HOUSE TOP BACKING.



## ACT II

SCENE.—LANCELOT'S bed-sitting room, furnished heavily in lodging-house style, antimacassars on furniture, and bad pictures hanging. The sideboard is ugly. At the back are a pallet bed and washing stand, the former hidden absolutely by a tall screen, in which a quill pen is stuck. There is a mirror on the mantelpiece. The large table is covered with litter of manuscripts and printed music, magazines, books, etc. Same litter everywhere. Duplicate quill pen in coal scuttle. The canary cage is hung on the left side of the window.

It is late afternoon, the light gradually fading. LANCELOT is discovered sitting despondently playing at the piano. The canary's rapturous singing holds the stage a moment or two. It must rarely die abruptly throughout the scene and may sometimes go advantageously with passages of dialogue, like an orchestral accompaniment. The specially obligatory outbursts of song are indicated in their place.

LANCELOT (to canary). Shut up! (To himself.) How would this do for the coda? (Plays a few bars. The canary only gradually ceases its trills.) Ach, waiting for that telegram unnerves me! Will that telegram never come? (Leans head on keyboard.)

ROSIE (knocking and entering with a large note on a tray. He does not notice her). Good afternoon, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (sitting up galvanized). Ah, is that my wire?

ROSIE. No, sir, your bill. (Crosses to him.)

LANCELOT. Oh! (Collapses again.)

ROSIE. For six weeks. (LANCELOT takes it up.) And Ma instructed me to say she is unhappily compelled to ask for immediate payment, but hopes you will not take it as an expression of the faintest distrust since she has the completest confidence in the word of a true gentleman, but it is merely to be regarded as a painful necessity consequent on her own quarterly bills coming in.

LANCELOT. Ha! (Opens it.)

ROSIE (goes to canary and feeds it). How is my pet? Didems now? Tune up now, you ungrateful little beast.

LANCELOT (feels in his pockets, turns them out gloomily, rises, picks up an MS.). I suppose your mother hasn't got change for a sonata in D minor?

ROSIE. A what, sir? (*Comes down a little L.C.*)

LANCELOT. Never mind. In a few years this may be worth a hundred times your bill; it may be circulating when the coins of Victoria are called in, and yet to-day— (*Throws it down angrily.*)

ROSIE. I'll ask her, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*taking up another*). Tell your mother this symphony in B flat major is to be performed at the Queen's Hall this season.

ROSIE (L.C.). What date, sir?

LANCELOT. That's what I'm expecting a wire about every instant from Gasco, and then—(*drops on stool again*)—I ought to be able to get some money. (*He plays.*)

ROSIE. I hope you will, Mr. Lancelot, I do hope you will—(*crosses towards door*)—for—(*shyly*)—we should miss you.

(*Hasty exit.*)

LANCELOT (*he stops playing and jumps up*). Was that a threat? I'm to be chucked. Even Mary Ann's place is safer. (*Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat downstairs*) Ah, the telegram from Gasco at last! (*Strides agitatedly up and down the room. Finally MARY ANN knocks. He is now near the fire.*) Come in!

(*MARY ANN opens door and closes it behind her, puts letter-tray on chair, produces gloves from her pocket and begins slowly putting them on.*)

(*Testily.*) What are you doing?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, pulling on my gloves.

LANCELOT (*stamping foot with impatience*). Yes, yes, but not when there's a wire. (*Rushes towards tray.*)

MARY ANN (*dropping gloves in agitation, seizing the tray and presenting it respectfully*). But you said I was always to put them on inside your door.

LANCELOT. Silly! Not when there is a wire. (*Tears it open.*)

MARY ANN (*picks up gloves.*) The devil!

MARY ANN (*nearly in tears*). Yessir.

(*She is going.*)

LANCELOT. Here, wait. Reply prepaid.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. I needn't have been in such a hurry; it's not the one I was expecting. You may put on your gloves. (*Crosses to R.C.*)

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Begins to pull them on.*)

LANCELOT. Poor little Mary Ann! It's only from Peter—you know Peter?

MARY ANN. Yessir, the nice, kind gentleman—

LANCELOT. Ah—(*walks away to R. up and down*)—not the nasty wild beast that I am!

MARY ANN. Please, sir, wild beasts are not nasty. I liked the lion in the circus—and you walk about like the lion did—up and down his cage, up and down.

LANCELOT (*laughing, leaning on piano*). I'm like a caged lion, eh?

MARY ANN (*smiling up at him*). Yessir, I often wish you had a tail to lash.

LANCELOT. A tail!

MARY ANN. Yessir. You've only got your hair to tear, and that must hurt, sir.

LANCELOT. Ha! Ha! So you pity the poor caged lion without a tail! (*Comes down R. of table.*)

MARY ANN (*smiling*). But you can roar, sir.

LANCELOT. Ha! Ha! Does that frighten my little girl? (*Leans on table.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir, I am glad. Because the more you roar, the more you write the lovely music. Oh, yes, sir, I quite prefer you roary.

LANCELOT. Do I write best when I'm roary?

MARY ANN. Oh my, sir! The moment I hear you growling I fill up the inkstand, and hunt around for your pen.

LANCELOT. Why, isn't my pen always on the table?

MARY ANN (*at L.C., laughing*). Oh, no, sir. I do wish, sir, you would aim near the fender, because I can mend the quill, but it's more trouble to take the ink out of the carpet.

LANCELOT. I'm sorry, Mary Ann. I didn't know I threw my pen about.

MARY ANN. I don't mind, sir, it's only the missus—at least I do tremble sometimes for the canary.

LANCELOT. My pen couldn't go through the wires.

MARY ANN. No, sir, not if you tried for it. But it's wonderful the places I have picked up that pen in. My, here it is now, sticking in the screen like an arrow— (*Picks it up, points it with her scissors—comes down R. close to him.*)

LANCELOT. Ach Himmel! It's very kind of you. (*Sticks point in his hair and sits on bottom R. end of table.*) You're quite my good fairy, aren't you?

MARY ANN. No, sir, I do try to be good, but I can't be a fairy—I haven't got wings.

LANCELOT (*h's arms round her*). Why, what would you do with wings? (*Smiling.*)

MARY ANN. Flap them and fly away to the green country.

LANCELOT. Without me? (*Kissing her.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir; you've learnt me to talk like a gentleman, and to wear gloves like a lady.

LANCELOT. You never kiss anybody but me?

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot, and I never shall, sir, never.

LANCELOT (*dropping her uneasily*). The telegraph boy will be fuming. (*Crosses down R. to fireplace.*)

MARY ANN. Not he, sir; he likes his leisure.

LANCELOT (*smiling and re-reading telegram*). Peter wants to bring Brahmsen here to tea.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. The great music publisher.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT (*glumly*). And Peter tells me Brahmsen is sending back all my MSS.

MARY ANN (*outburst of joy*). I'm so glad, sir. (*Crosses to c.*)

LANCELOT. You don't understand. Brahmsen's a Philistine.

MARY ANN. What, sir, out of the Bible? (*L.C.*)

LANCELOT. Never mind—too difficult for you. A Brute.

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT (*half to himself—moves up*). But I don't like Brahmsen coming here and seeing my bed. (*Looks morbidly towards screen*.)

MARY ANN (*reassuringly*). Please, sir, I put clean sheets this morning.

LANCELOT. You little goose! (*Moves down to top of table*.) But I can't lose the opportunity of giving Brahmsen a piece of my mind.

MARY ANN. Yes, skim it off the top, sir—it will do you good. Oh, dear, I do wish you had a tail to lash. (*Moves L.*)

LANCELOT. Where is my pen? Mary Ann, what have you done with my pen? It's never where I put it.

MARY ANN. Yes, it is, sir. (*Draws it out of his hair*. *Bus.* MARY ANN humming "Kiss me good-night," etc.)

(LANCELOT takes it and writes on the reply telegram.)

LANCELOT. There! (*Gives it to her on tray*.)

MARY ANN (*taking it*). Yessir. (*At door she draws off her gloves before her exit*.)

CANARY. Two, two!

LANCELOT. Shut up! (*Rises and goes up to cage*.) She thinks I adore you—just as she never suspects the gloves are to hide her red hands. Oh, what a hypocrite I'm becoming. (*Moves down R.*)

(A little pause, then a timid knock.)

MARY ANN (*enters holding the reply telegram in one gloved hand, the other carefully behind her*). Please, sir, the telegraph boy says it's sixpence more—only sixpence prepaid.

LANCELOT (*crossing to her c. and taking it*). Oh, dear, am I not an ass!

MARY ANN (*L.C.*). You can't help it, sir. You're so clever!

LANCELOT. You wound and heal in one. But have I got sixpence? (*Feeling in pocket*.) No, not a copper. Haven't you got sixpence, Mary Ann?

MARY ANN. No, sir—once I had ninepence,

(LANCELOT sits impatiently L. of table.)

all in threepenny pieces, but the vicar, he did give me such a holy lecture that I did give my ninepence for the black people in Africa—to wash their souls, you know, sir. But next year missus is going to pay me wages—she is so good to me.

LANCELOT (*studying telegram*). Oh, everybody seems good to you.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, everybody—except Miss Rosie.

LANCELOT. Rosie—what's the matter with Rosie?

MARY ANN. She *will* feed my canary.

LANCELOT. Well, but isn't that nice for the canary?

MARY ANN (*archly*). It's nicer for Miss Rosie.

LANCELOT. What are you hiding there?

MARY ANN. Nothing, sir.

LANCELOT. Yes, you are.

MARY ANN. Only my hand, sir— (*Shows it bare.*) I didn't know if I was to put on both gloves, being half a wire.

LANCELOT. Ha! Ha! So you hedged, one on, one off.

(*Both laugh.*)

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. Ha! Ha! Gives me an idea, I can take off half the telegram. (*Sits L. of table. Counts on fingers.*) "Pleased to see you and Brahmson, if only to give him a piece of my mind." Twelve words must go out. (*Scratches and writes.*) There! Tell the boy, only those three words. Here! You ought to be able to read them by now.

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Reading painfully.*) "Bring—the—brute."

LANCELOT. Yes—that's shorter, sweeter and cheaper.

(*Both laugh.*)

(*MARY ANN draws off her glove, puts it in her pocket and exit.*)

Have I got any whisky for the beggars? (*Opens sideboard, produces bottle—turns it upside down.*) Not a thimbleful. (*Dolefully swinging bottle.*) No whisky, no wire, no money, no work published, no— (*With tremendous transition.*) By Jove! now I've got that coda.

(*His face afire with ecstasy, he seizes the pen and scribbles feverishly on a sheet of ruled paper, humming gently to himself. Suddenly a clarinet outside the window begins to play with many flourishes "Kiss me good-night, dear love, Dream of the old delight," etc. He hurls the pen on the table with an inarticulate roar, and jumps up.*)

If I hear that sickly sentimental stuff again, I shall burst. (*He rushes to window and throws it open.*)

(*The music is louder.*)

Go away!

(*The music continues.*)



He smiles up at me. Der Teufel! No, I don't want an encore. Great Scott! And I haven't a penny to throw to him. (*Looks round desperately. Tears hair. There is a knock at the door. He calls angrily in the new direction.*) Oh, let me alone!

(*The door opens and MRS. LEADBATTER enters, followed by ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hexcuse me, sir, but Hi've let you alone for six weeks, and Hi——

LANCELOT. Give me a penny.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Give you a penny?

LANCELOT (c.). Don't argue, give me a penny!

ROSIE (L.). Here you are, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (*clutches at it, hurls it into the street. The music ceases, and he closes the window with a bang*). Thank you, that's all! (*With a dismissing wave of the hand.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (L.C.). That's hall! And you're sure you don't want more than a penny of our 'ard-earned savings?

ROSIE (L.). Hush, Ma!

MRS. LEADBATTER (*angrily*). Well, you talk to 'im then, you're a laidy. I'm only a 'ard-working widow. I 'ad to keep two 'usbands eating their 'eads off, and if I'd a wanted a third I'd a haxed 'im.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma! (*Giggles.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't "Oh, Ma" me! I've got a proposal to make, and I shall make it.

ROSIE (*in higher giggling key*). Oh, Ma!

LANCELOT. Yes, yes—what is your proposal? Sit down.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Thank you, sir. (*Sits L. of table.*) Well sir, I did think that you—that sleeping and heating and drinking 'ere for nothing all these weeks, you'd feel uncomfortable like, not being one of my 'usbands.

(*ROSIE, giggling, tugging at MRS. LEADBATTER's sleeve.*)

LANCELOT (*frowning at ROSIE*). Quite so, quite so. It is uncomfortable.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*triumphantly*). You see, Rosie! And so we thought you'd like to work it out.

LANCELOT. Work it out! Help Mary Ann, you mean?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, no, sir! What I suggested to Ma was——

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't interrupt your holders. You see, sir, Rosie and me 'ave been thinking of taking lessons on the pianner——

LANCELOT. Rosie and you?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Ma means only me.

LANCELOT. Oh!

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, I'm bringing hup Rosie to be a laidy.

LANCELOT. So I see. But have you got a piano of your own?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, no, sir.

LANCELOT. Well, but how is your Rosie to practise? Unless she practises several hours a day, my lessons would be wasted.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Ah, you don't know my Rosie. You mustn't judge her by hother gals——

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma, you make me blush!

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). My good woman, I practised six hours a day myself.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Yes, but it don't come so natural to a man. It's like darning socks. You give Rosie lessons hevery day, and we'll arrange to leave you alone till your money comes in.

(LANCELOT *paces agitatedly up and down.*)

Well, sir, is it a bargain?

LANCELOT (*clenches his fist*). Yes—dirt cheap. Sit down!

(ROSIE *goes up C., seizes music stool and plants it down with a jerk that sends it twirling round and round.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*starting up*). Oh, not yet—I 'aven't time to stay now. I've four teas to make. (*Crosses to door.*) We'll come back after tea.

LANCELOT. But you're not both taking lessons?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, sir, Rosie couldn't very well be so long alone with a gentleman; could she?

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma, you make me blush!

(*Exeunt.*)

(LANCELOT *paces wildly up and down, then throws himself into his armchair in utter abandonment. A knock, he does not answer. Another knock; he makes no sign. The door opens, and MARY ANN enters with laden tray, deposits it on chair near door, and starts pulling on her gloves.*)

LANCELOT (*looking up eagerly*). Ah, the wire from Gasco!

MARY ANN. No, sir. (*Shows hands.*) I've got them both on. And I've put three cups. (*Turns and extracts small table-cloth from sideboard.*)

LANCELOT. Three! Whom for?

MARY ANN. The gentlemen who are coming—Mr. Peter and the Brute.

LANCELOT. Oh, ah! (*Laughing.*) What thoughtfulness! Come here, child.

(MARY ANN, *dropping cloth on sideboard, goes to his chair.*)

(*Taking her in his arms.*) Oh, Mary Ann, I'm so miserable!

MARY ANN. Then hadn't you better have your pen, Mr. Lancelot? (*Breaks away to find pen and gives it to him.*)

LANCELOT. Ah, you agree with Shelley. They learn in suffering what they teach in song, eh? (*He pulls her gently down to him.*)

MARY ANN (*kneeling by his chair*). Yessir. And the song stops the suffering. No matter what I'm doing, plates, or steps, or carpets, if your music is going . . . I feel back in the country, standing at sunset under the big ellum by the stream. Eh, my word, it was nice in the spring-time, with the bluebells— (*Looks up shyly.*)

LANCELOT (*patting her hair*). Yes, yes—go on—so my music takes you back to the green country.

MARY ANN (*ecstatically*). Eessir. That gives me the wings—and I flap 'em and am off—and—(*with growing ecstasy*)—when I heard the music outside just now—

LANCELOT (*shrieks*). What! (*Throws pen.*) Ach, Himmel! (*Goes across foot of table and up to window.*)

(MARY ANN jumps from his side in terror.)

MARY ANN. Oh, sir, you'd better have your pen, sir. (*Picks up pen again.*)

LANCELOT (*laughing*). No, no. Go on. (*Coming down c., leans on chair behind table.*) So you liked "Good-night and Good-bye"?

MARY ANN. Oughtn't I to ha' liked it, sir?

LANCELOT. Oh, yes—it's the correct thing. England is crazy over it. Keeley Lesterre—that's the lucky composer's name—has made a fortune by it. (*Moves to L. of table.*) His portrait is in all the magazines—here, look! (*Standing in front of table—shows MARY ANN magazine.*) Waving hair, rolling eyes, curling moustache, great white brow, and every girl who squalls "Kiss me good-night, dear love," is dying to kiss him. So you see you're quite in the fashion, aren't you?

MARY ANN. No, sir. I don't want to kiss him.

LANCELOT (*L.C., laughing*). You funny little Mary Ann, one forgives you everything, even admiration of Keeley Lesterre.

MARY ANN (*R.C.*). Please, sir, it's because the song makes me think of my mother.

LANCELOT. Eh?

MARY ANN. That's what she said to me when she died. Kiss, me, dear love, good-night. (*Breaks down.*)

LANCELOT. Now, now, don't cry. (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

MARY ANN. I'm not crying, sir. (*Begins clearing away litter from half the table in order to lay cloth.*) I am so happy when I think of her—of her and little Sally and feyther all together in Heaven. Only I was so silly when she laid dying, what do you think I did?

LANCELOT (*down R.*). Heaven knows. Offered her your canary? (*Leans on R. of piano.*)

MARY ANN (*behind table*). No, sir. But she kept saying she was going to little Sally, so I brought her flowers, and apples and bits of cake to take to little Sally with my love. I put them on her pillow, but the flowers faded, and the cake got mouldy—mother was such a long time dying—and at last—(*smiling through tears*)—I ate the apples myself. After a while she forgot about little Sally

and said she was going to see my big brother again—and I thought she was going to America—but her last words were—(*breaks down*)—like the song.

LANCELOT. Yes, yes, dear, you're quite right to like it. (*Turns to fireplace.*)

MARY ANN. And besides, it reminds me of you. (*Finishes clearing litter.*)

LANCELOT (*perturbed again*). Of me?

MARY ANN. Yes—you kiss me good-night.

LANCELOT (*uneasily*). Yes, yes, I know—but you mustn't talk about it. (*Crosses up R.C.*)

MARY ANN. No, sir—I only tell Dick.

LANCELOT (*alarmed*). Dick?

MARY ANN. My canary, sir. (*Spreads the cloth over half the table.*)

LANCELOT (*moving down R.*). Oh, ah, yes! I thought it might be your wicked brother.

MARY ANN. That's Tom, sir.

LANCELOT. Ah, yes, Tom. Well, it's lucky Dick isn't a parrot. (*Paces up R.*)

MARY ANN. You'd better have your pen, sir! (*Offers it again.*)

LANCELOT (*taking it*). You insist on my writing to-day?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

(*There is the violent ring of a bell. MARY ANN hastily runs over and fetches laden tray from chair and puts it on cloth.*)

Missus will be cross.

LANCELOT. Bother missus. Stay here.

MARY ANN (*smiling at him*). Oh, no, sir, I mustn't. I'll come back with the tea. (*Tears off gloves and dashes out.*)

LANCELOT. Dear little Mary Ann, you've given me my pen again—it's symbolic, for you are coming to me in music, translating yourself into rippling waves of sound, you and your sunset and your bluebells, and your big ellums by the river—

(*Listens with rapt expression as to an inward celestial symphony, then sits at table and scrawls in inspiration. Several knocks on the door. He pays no attention, but scribbles in feverish ecstasy. Door bursts open, revealing MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*cheerfully*). 'Ere we are!

LANCELOT (*looking up*). What do you want? (*Writes on rhapsodically.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. We want to tune up.

ROSIE (*giggles*). Oh, Ma! (*Giggles.*)

LANCELOT (*hurling his pen away into the coal scuttle*). Come along, Rosie, up you tune. (*Angrily sets music stool whirling again.*)

ROSIE (*moves up to C.*). Do I go on the roundabouts?

MRS. LEADBATTER. Don't be frisky, Rosie. Wait till the stool stops.

LANCELOT. And you, Mrs. Leadbatter, where would you like to sit?

MRS. LEADBATTER. It ain't as I feared to trust her with you, sir.

ROSIE. Oh, Ma!

MRS. LEADBATTER. For I knows, sir, you're a gentleman. But it's the neighbours—they'll talk so when I tell 'em about it. (*Sits chair L. by door.*)

ROSIE. Oh, Ma! (*Giggles, sits on stool, striking the notes with one finger, producing a faint suggestion of "Daisy, Daisy," amid giggles.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*beamingly*). There, sir! She makes it go. What did I tell you, sir? She gets her music genius from her father; he was a wonder on the concertina—you couldn't get him to stop.

LANCELOT (*on ROSIE's right*). You mustn't play with one finger. Begin with your first finger. Like this! (*Plays scale.*)

(*ROSIE giggling tries the scale. Bus.*)

No, no, that's not your first finger—this— (*Dabs her thumb on key.*)

ROSIE. That's my thumb, sir.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You don't call her thumbs fingers.

LANCELOT. No, I call her fingers thumbs.

(*Bus. LANCELOT biting his lips, his fingers working nervously.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. But, hexcoose me, sir, I don't hear no toons.

LANCELOT (*coming down to R. of MRS. LEADBATTER.*) Oh, it's tunes you want. (*Clenching his fist.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. What helse?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

MRS. LEADBATTER. There! That bird's got more toon to hit!

LANCELOT. But Rosie can't be a canary at one jump.

MRS. LEADBATTER. You don't make a beginning, sir. Mrs. Robins, across the street, is marrying 'er heldest gal to a hiron-monger next Monday, and I wanted Rosie to play at the wedding.

LANCELOT (*through his clenched teeth*). Well, what tune would you like? Name your tune.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, I'm not particular, so long as it's lively.

ROSIE. Oh, no, Ma, I want to learn something classical.

LANCELOT (*placing a chair on ROSIE's left and sitting on it, grimly*). Ah, classical—

ROSIE. Yes, like "Kiss me good-night, de——"

(*With a great wild-beast cry LANCELOT sweeps both hands over piano in fiendish discord. The canary screams. ROSIE and MRS. LEADBATTER jump up, the door bursts open and PETER rushes in. LANCELOT races over to him, and takes both his hands and almost falls into his arms.*)

LANCELOT. Peter! Thank goodness! (*Turns to ROSIE and*

MRS. LEADBATTER.) Later on, my good creatures, later on. (*Moves to window and opens it.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*angrily*). I'd 'ave you remember that Rosie expects to be treated like a laidy.

ROSIE (*giggling*). Oh, Ma! (*Dragging her out.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And I'm a 'ard-working widow and my hassthma is awful; I can't trollop up and down stairs as I did when I first—

LANCELOT. Give me a little breathing space. (*Crosses down to fireplace.*)

PETER (*looking slowly up at ceiling and down at floor with comical wonder—L.C.*). I hope I didn't interrupt a proposal for Rosie's hand.

LANCELOT (*R.C., lights pipe*). Rosie's hand! Beastly butter-fingered paw (*foot of table*). But you couldn't have got my reply telegram?

PETER (*laughing*). I took that for granted, as we were coming whatever you said. We were playing whist at the club; I made Brahmson go round to his office to have all your stuff swept together. I'm glad he hasn't taken the tiniest thing.

LANCELOT. Glad? (*Moves a little to him.*)

PETER (*L.C.*). Yes, you'd have accused me of bribing him to publish it.

LANCELOT (*smiling, crosses to him*). I dare say I should. But he'll be sorry when he sees my Symphony in B flat Major is to be done at the Queen's Hall. (*Moves back to down R.*)

PETER. Oh, it is? That's ripping. When?

LANCELOT. I'm expecting to hear the date any instant from Gasco.

PETER (*groaning*). From Gasco! Oh dear, I hope I shall live to hear your B flat Major. But my heart is not as good as it might be.

LANCELOT (*breaking down*). It certainly isn't. (*Turns away—sits on armchair R.*)

PETER. Poor Lancelot! (*Crosses to R.C.*). Don't you know Gasco is short for Gas and Co.? Ah! how these artistic chaps do gas. Their promises are beautiful bubbles from soft soap, and made to burst. By the way, a little gas here would be an improvement. How short the days are getting! (*Turns up C.*) Got a match, Lancelot?

LANCELOT. Oh, Mary Ann always hides them somewhere. (*A knock.*) There she is with the tea.

PETER. Ah, I've got matches. (*Produces box from pocket.*)

LANCELOT. Come in!

(*Enter MARY ANN, dimly seen with the teapot, which she places on chair.*)

PETER (*strikes a match*). MARY ANN is brilliantly revealed drawing on gloves. Hallo! (*Drops match.*)

LANCELOT (R.C., *abashed*). Clumsy! You'll burn Mrs. Lead-batter's carpet.

(MARY ANN's hands are now bare again.)

PETER. What on earth were you putting on gloves for, my girl?

(LANCELOT flushes and turns away uneasily.)

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). Please, sir, I've got to go out and I'm in a hurry!

PETER (L.C.). Then why did you take them off again?

(MARY ANN bursts into a flood of tears and runs from the room.)

Now I've offended her. Did you see how she tossed her pretty head? Why, she's left the teapot on the chair. What an odd girl!

LANCELOT (R.). She's got such a lot to do. (*Lights gas over the mantelpiece.*) I suppose she sometimes gets a bit queer in the head.

PETER (L.C.). I don't think it's that—she looks much brighter than when I saw her in the passage that night—and her accent sounds quite refined. She must have picked it up from you.

LANCELOT. Nonsense, nonsense! Bring over that teapot.

PETER (*stretches out hand*). Oh! It's scalding—no wonder Mary Ann put on gloves!

LANCELOT. Yes, I dare say that was the reason. Take—er—take an antimacassar.

PETER. And scorch it?

LANCELOT. I'd like to make a bonfire of them all.

PETER (*lifts teapot*). It's all right. My handkerchief will do.

CANARY (*with sudden loud song*). Sweet, sweet!

PETER (*drops teapot*). What's that?

LANCELOT. Oh, you gomeril! Only a canary.

PETER. It's all right. Only a little spilt. (*Wipes carpet with handkerchief.*) You should warn a fellow. I never knew you kept pets. (*Rises, the teapot still in his hand.*)

LANCELOT. I don't. It isn't mine.

PETER. Whose is it?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann's.

PETER. Mary Ann's? (*Starts letting tea pour out of spout.*)

LANCELOT. That carpet will be ruined. Mary Ann asked to be allowed to keep the bird here—it's sunnier.

PETER (*wiping the new mess, wringing out handkerchief over carpet, to LANCELOT's frenzy*). But doesn't it worry you when you're at work—a rival composer? (*Beginning to pour tea into a cup.*)

LANCELOT. Not so much as my rivals on the barrel organ—not so much as that charlatan Keeley Lesterre.

PETER. Keeley Lesterre! (*Pours tea outside cup on cloth, etc.* At L.C.) Oh, it's too scalding—I'll, I'll have to send you a pound

of our best Bolgravian Blend. (*Wipes cloth with handkerchief.*) But don't you find it a bore to feed the little stranger? I suppose you give it seed, biscuits—(*looking up from the mopping*)—I hope you don't give it butter.

LANCELOT (*R.C., roaring*). Don't be an ass!

(*PETER falls into chair.*)

You don't suppose I bother my head whether the thing eats butter or marmalade. (*Goes to table, begins to pour out tea. Bus.*)

PETER (*taking him up sharp*). Who feeds it then?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann, I suppose! Sugar?

PETER. She hangs about here feeding it?

LANCELOT. Pitch that dirty rag out of the window! I believe it eats all day long—gets supplied in the morning like a coal-scuttle. Sugar? (*Louder than before.*)

PETER (*going to and opening window solemnly*). Lancelot, (*throws handkerchief out*) Mary Ann's mashed on you. (*Shuts window.*)

LANCELOT. Don't! I loathe that word. Besides, now I come to think of it, Rosie feeds it also. Sugar? (*Very loud.*)

PETER (*coming down L.C.*). Then Rosie is—dead nuts—too.

LANCELOT. Good Heavens! (*Pitching a number of lumps of sugar into PETER's cup.*) One would think I were Keeley Lesterre himself—the maiden's prayer. (*Pours tea for himself.*)

PETER (*eagerly*). I wish you were! I wish to Heaven you'd knock off a popular ballad, and with the profits give us a grand opera.

LANCELOT. Never! Take your tea.

PETER. Look here— (*Taking up tea.*) Don't swear now! Money-making music is just a trick—and I want to show you. (*Produces music from pocket.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, I know the trick—treacle!

PETER. No, treacle's not enough. It must be a particular brand. (*Takes mouthful of tea.*)

LANCELOT. Golden syrup. Plough! The sweet sticky stuff!

PETER (*sputtering*). Not so damned sweet and sticky as this stuff! (*Sets down tea disgustedly. Unrolls music slowly and impressively.*) Now, this is the sort of thing I want you to imitate.

LANCELOT (*shrieks*). Not "Good-night and Good-bye," I hope!

PETER (*coolly*). Don't hope so loud. It is!

LANCELOT (*rising*). Then good-bye and good-night! (*About to tear it up.*)

PETER. Hold on! That's not your property.

LANCELOT. Imitate that! I'd rather teach it to Rosie! Yes, ha! ha! ha! That will be indeed a revenge. I can imagine no worse fate for a song than to be played by Rosie! (*Places it on rack of piano.*)



PETER. You are teaching Rosie ?

(LANCELOT strikes keys.)

Oh, poor chap !

(*Embarrassed pause. LANCELOT drinks tea—PETER takes up the MS. LANCELOT has been writing and peruses it.*)

How charming ! I say, you must go on with this. (*Takes bread-and-butter.*)

LANCELOT. Ach Himmel ! I was just in the vein and then that Rosie came and giggled it all away.

PETER (*reading on and munching*). Delicious !

LANCELOT (*gratified*). Ah, what does it suggest to you ?

PETER (*reading MS. slowly and waving his arm in time comically as he excogitates*). The woodland—a rippling river—innocence—a nymph—

LANCELOT. By Jove ! You've got some musical soul after all, Peter. (PETER gives an insulted "Tut.") It is about a maiden, simple and sweet, dreaming amid the bluebells by the stream at sunset.

PETER (*eating bread-and-butter comically*). And who is this wonderful woodland creature who has inspired you so ?

LANCELOT. Oh—er—just—er—imagination.

PETER. And what shall you call it ?

LANCELOT. Merely "Meadowsweet." (*A knock.*) Yes ?

MARY ANN. Not any higher, sir !

(*Enter MARY ANN bearing a cheap wooden box on her head, followed by BRAHMSON, very fat, in fur coat ; as he enters he removes very broad-brimmed, low hat and waves it courteously.*)

BRAHMSON (*speaking with strong German accent only partially indicated in the following text*). Ach, Mr. Lancelot, pardon that I am a leetle late—my driver did not know ze way.

LANCELOT (*extending hand*). I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Brahmson.

BRAHMSON. Ah, more sarcasm. Wie geht's, Peter ? (*Gives his left hand to PETER, who is L. of him*). If I had known before that Mr. Lancelot was a friend of yours, I should have made an exception. But how can I see composers ? Zo many geniuses, zo few publishers ! (*Sits L. of table.*)

LANCELOT. Forgive me if I wrote rudely.

BRAHMSON. Ach, everybody writes rudely. If I don't publish, zey call me a fool—

MARY ANN (*at door—correcting*). Brute ! (*All turn.*)

BRAHMSON. Zo ?

LANCELOT. She is talking to her canary.

CANARY. Sweet ! sweet !

BRAHMSON. And if I do publish they call me a cheat. Nicht wahr, Peter ?

PETER (L.C., *confused*). I never—er—I—but what's in that box ?  
 BRAHMSON. Your friend's manuscripts !

PETER. What !

LANCELOT. I never sent you all that.

BRAHMSON. Yes, indeed, mein friend, leetle by leetle, like ze snowflakes that make ze avalanche. *Colossal!* Your letters of abuse—Na ! zat would need anozer box.

PETER. Poor Mary Ann ! (*Goes to help the box down.*)

MARY ANN (*moving back*). They're not heavy, sir.

PETER. Mary Ann carrying the music of the future—what a symbolic picture !

BRAHMSON (*rises*). Allow me, my child.

(BRAHMSON *takes box and tenders it formally to LANCELOT. MARY ANN crosses up back to C., then to fireplace.*)

With zanks !

LANCELOT. Thank you ! (*Stands it down R. of table.*) And may I give you a cup of tea ?

(PETER *goes to and kneels by box. He opens it and searches in the music.*)

BRAHMSON. You shall first give me my receipt. (*Hands LANCELOT paper to sign.*)

LANCELOT. Certainly. Where is my pen ? Mary Ann, you're always tidying away my pen.

MARY ANN (*with a smile*). Here it is, sir. (*Taking pen from the coal-scuttle.*)

LANCELOT. How did it get there ? (*He writes receipt.*)

BRAHMSON. But you have not looked to see. I want no more letters.

LANCELOT. Oh, I dare say it's all right.

PETER (*examining box*). Ah, there's that sonata ! (*He takes it to piano and begins playing it.*)

(LANCELOT *signs silently and hands paper to BRAHMSON.*)

BRAHMSON. Zank you. And now ve can talk. (*Sits L. of table.*) Believe me, mein friend, I would not give you zese back—if there was von single thing I could sell, a set of lancers or a taking song—

LANCELOT. But I sent you songs. (*Rummages in box, throwing some on floor, and drags out MSS.*) Get away, tea-peddler. (*Pushes PETER away from piano and puts a song on rack over the other piece. PETER crosses down R., sits in armchair.*) Listen to this ! No, you needn't listen, run away, Mary Ann ! (*Begins to play.*)

(MARY ANN *exit sorrowfully.*)

BRAHMSON (*looking over his shoulder*). And I need not listen eizer. Look at your aggompaniments—all accidentals. You'll never get ze young ladies to play that.

LANCELOT (*rises, comes to table*). I don't write for young ladies. (*Sits.*)

BRAHMSON. But I bublish for zem. Mein Gott! Where else are my customers to come from?

LANCELOT. Do you mean to say that a musician in this God-forsaken country must have no chords but tonics and dominants!

BRAHMSON. He can have zem at home—in ze box! And zen your melody itself—quite out of ze average young lady's gompas.

PETER (*R., at fire*). Yes, Lancelot. In music Rosie rules the roost.

BRAHMSON (*now standing, picking up song, revealing another underneath*). No, von't do, von't do. Ah, now, zis song (*picking up the under one*) zat I rejoice to see you are studying, "Good-night and Good-bye."

(LANCELOT makes a great sweep with his arm, smashes all the tea things and moves L.)

PETER. Oh, Brahmsen, you shouldn't have mentioned that, it's his red rag—

BRAHMSON. Ah, he is jealous of you, what!

PETER. Hush! Hush! (*Makes frantic signs to him.*)

BRAHMSON. Let him be jealous. All ze better. Now I tell him ze royalties I haf paid you.

PETER (*desperately*). Shut up! (*Pulling BRAHMSON's coat.*)

BRAHMSON (*slowly and unctuously*). On zat one song—

LANCELOT. You paid Peter!

PETER. He's joking. (*Looks daggers at BRAHMSON.*)

BRAHMSON. It vas no joke—four thousand pounds. (*Clapping him on the back.*) What, my great little Keeley Lesterre! (*Turns up c.*)

LANCELOT (*L. of table, flaring up as if to tear PETER to pieces*). You are Keeley Lesterre?

PETER (*seizes bread knife and tenders it to LANCELOT*). Cut off my head and be done with it.

LANCELOT. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

PETER. I don't see where the fun comes in. (*Crosses down R.*)

LANCELOT. You! You are the romantic, eye-rolling, moustache-waving, white-browed Keeley Lesterre—Oh heavens! (*Seizes the magazine.*) Look upon this picture and on this. (*Imitating somebody's Hamlet.*)

PETER (*sullenly*). I can't help Brahmsen's dodges.

BRAHMSON (*behind table—laughing*). Ze papers come to me for a portrait of Keeley Lesterre, I give zem a portrait to please my young ladies. Peter, he is not suitable for a sentimental gomposer, what! No great white brow, no curly hair—he! he! he!

LANCELOT (*doubled up with laughter, he sits L. of table*). Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

PETER. Haven't you cackled enough!

BRAHMSON. Now you—Mr. Lancelot—Heaven has made you ze very thing—you haf only to write ze song to match—and zat box proves you have ze talent for anything. To show you I do not flatter, here—(*producing notebook*)—I buy ze song for thirty pounds paid in advance—and the words you haf for nothing. Vere are zey? (*Looks in pocketbook.*) Ah, here. Ze song will be called “Adieu and farevell,” and it goes, “Von kiss, my dear, farevell.”

LANCELOT (*rising*). But that’s the same as “Good-night and Good-bye”!

PETER. That’s the idea, always stick close to a success.

BRAHMSON. Zere, mein friend. (*Rolls up the three ten-pound notes in the paper of words.*) Ze words and ze money—you give me back ze words and ze music. (*Puts them on table near LANCELOT.*)

LANCELOT (*taking it up and parodying BRAHMSON’S manner*). With zanks. (*Places them on table near BRAHMSON.*)

PETER (*down R.*). Don’t be an idiot, Lancelot. You must keep the pot boiling.

LANCELOT (*moving to PETER*). Thank you. Keep your teapot wisdom to yourself.

PETER. This is only by-play, old chap. I do music after business. Why shouldn’t you do business after music?

BRAHMSON (*adds another ten-pound note*). Zere’s another ten. And anozer twenty-five if the sale exceeds ten thousand. And zat’s my last word. (*Pushes the notes and paper of words towards LANCELOT—turns up C.*)

LANCELOT (*R.C.*). You have heard mine.

(*En’er MARY ANN with a telegram on tray, her hands bare.*)

LANCELOT. Ah—the wire from Gasco! (*Rushes over to get it and tears it open frenziedly—his face falls—lets telegram flutter to the ground.*)

PETER (*R.*). From Gas and Co.?

LANCELOT (*L.C., despairing whisper*). Yes—you were right.

MARY ANN (*L., perceives crockery*). Oh dear, everything’s smashed up! (*A pause, goes to LANCELOT.*) Is there any answer, sir?

LANCELOT (*walks slowly to the table, takes up notes and puts them in pocket—tragically*). There is my answer!

PETER. Hooray! I could do a waltz. (*Seizes a chair and waltzes.*)

(*MARY ANN picks up telegram and hands it to LANCELOT, who drops it on floor.*)

“Kiss me, dear love.” Oh! (*Stops waltz abruptly.*) No offence, old fellow. (*Catches sight of MARY ANN looking mystified.*) All right, Mary Ann, no answer.

(*MARY ANN crosses him to door.*)

Stop! (*Crosses to L.*) I'm sorry I made you cry before—here's half a crown—get yourself another pair of gloves.

MARY ANN. No, thank you, sir. (*Dignified exit with tray.*)

PETER. The little minx! (*Turns up L.*)

LANCELOT (*tragically*). She refuses and I accept.

BRAHMSON (R.C.). Von wise, von foolish.

LANCELOT. No! Let us be fools together—(*Draws out notes.*)

(*Door bursts open, admitting MRS. LEADBATTER and ROSIE.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hexcoose me, sir, but I can't wait about hall day—O Heavens, my carpet is ruined! (*Kneels, feeling carpet.*)

ROSIE. And the crockery—O golly! (*Recovering gentility.*) What a catastrophe!

LANCELOT. Take your money (*gives her one note*); take your crockery (*gives another*); take your carpet (*gives a third*); take a week's notice (*gives her the last*), and take your departure (*gives her the paper of words.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*clutching money, and seizing ROSIE's hand again*). Come away, Rosie, he's taken again. (*Frightened exit of both, ROSIE giggling hysterically.*)

BRAHMSON (C., *laughing*). Adieu and farevell with a vengeance. Vat!

PETER (L.C.). Yes, I think we'd better go too. (*To BRAHMSON.*) You'll get your song. (*To LANCELOT.*) Good-bye, old man.

LANCELOT. Good-bye. I'm sorry this vulgar scene should have occurred.

PETER. I'm not. It woke you up. When inclined to dream again, remember Rosie.

BRAHMSON (*goes to LANCELOT and shakes hands*). And write for her. Auf Wiedersehen.

(*Exeunt PETER and BRAHMSON.*)

LANCELOT. Write for Rosie! O Heavens, and I thought teaching her was the lowest hell. (*Goes up to window and sits on sill.*)

(*MARY ANN enters with tray containing three notes, gold, silver, coppers, and papers. She puts it on chair, and draws on her gloves.*)

LANCELOT. Dear Mary Ann, she is the one comfort left me.

(*MARY ANN brings the letter-tray.*)

MARY ANN (C.). Your receipt and your change, sir, and missus says she's only charged you half a suvrin for the crockery and the carpet, but it's sovereign, not suvrin, isn't it, sir?

LANCELOT (R.C.). I don't care whether she's charged suvrins or sovereigns. Three notes back and lots of gold, and silver and coppers. I'm quite rich. Ah, that must be the receipt—(*takes up the paper*

*of words, reads in surprise*) "Adieu and farewell." Ha! ha! Did I give her that too?

MARY ANN (*briskly*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*hesitatingly*). How funny, for I did give notice. (*Moves to armchair R.*)

MARY ANN (*tragically*). You're going?

LANCELOT. Yes, thank God. (*Sits.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, please sir, then I must go too. (*Now behind the table.*)

LANCELOT. You? Where?

MARY ANN. Wherever you lodge, sir. I can get work at the same place.

LANCELOT (*rises*). But, my child, I'm going to the country. (*He goes to her.*)

MARY ANN (*R.C.*). Oh, please sir, I should like that better.

LANCELOT. You simple little thing! (*Takes her face in his hands—then puts her from him and walks about it in agitation. Stops at canary.*) O Dick, Dick, was ever a man so tempted?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet! (*Carols with varying cadence.*)

MARY ANN. Please, sir, if you lived in a farm, I could help the farmer's missus, and drive the milk-cart.

(*The bird still sings.*)

LANCELOT (*to the canary*). You are right, Dick, it would be a charity to rescue her from this drudgery. (*Aloud.*) Well, perhaps—(*Coming down c.*)

MARY ANN (*joyfully*). Oh, I'll tell the missus. (*Starts towards door.*)

LANCELOT. Hush! Nobody must ever know. (*Detaining her.*)

MARY ANN. Not missus—?

LANCELOT. No, no. It must be a secret between us—like the gloves. Do you understand? (*He moves towards the fire and then speaks half to himself.*) We've both slaved and suffered without reward—we need a little sunshine, a little of the joy of life. (*Returning towards MARY ANN.*) Yes, you shall come with me.

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot! (*Runs to him hysterically.*)

LANCELOT. My little good fairy shall flap her wings and fly away with me to the green country, and we shall be alone in a little cottage—you and I—

MARY ANN (*with innocent surprise*). By ourselves!

LANCELOT. Yes, you shall be my little housekeeper—and in the evening at sunset you shall fold your wings, and stand by the river and dream.

(*The canary sings louder.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot! And we will take the canary too!

LANCELOT. Yes, dear!

MARY ANN. Just we three !

LANCELOT. Just we three—and the music box.

MARY ANN (*slowly—wistfully*). And the music. (*Nestles to him.*)

(*The canary stops.*)

LANCELOT (*with passion and solemnity*). And then—then it will not be good-bye nor good-night. Do you understand ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir ! (*Nestles closer to him.*)

LANCELOT. But think, think, Mary Ann ! (*Gently puts her away.*) Do you understand ?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, I understand—(*coming to him again.*) I shall be with you always.

LANCELOT.—Well !—I shall look after you always.

MARY ANN. Yes, yes, always ! (*Nestles to him again.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, you little white Topsy ! I don't believe you know how you came into the world. I dare say you "'specs you growed."

MARY ANN. No, sir, God made me.

(*He puts her away again—and stands looking at her, conscience-stricken.*)

CURTAIN.

### ACT III

*The same SCENE—a week later. It is evening. The gas is lit. MSS. all neatly cleared away. A syphon and whisky on the table.*

MARY ANN is discovered on her knees, cording the music box, while LANCELOT with his back to the fire is smoking a pipe.

MARY ANN (*down R. tying on the label, a little hampered by her gloves*). There, sir. The music is ready to go.

LANCELOT (*gaily*). Ready to accompany us, eh? And we've lots of it to finish in the cottage, haven't we, child?

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot!

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

MARY ANN (*crosses up C.*) Oh, please, sir, how am I to steal the canary out?

LANCELOT. Dick had better go with my luggage in the morning. Make me a present of him, then you'll have nothing to hamper you when you follow me on Thursday.

MARY ANN. Thursday will be such a long time.

LANCELOT. Why, scarcely long enough to evade suspicion. Only two days after me, little silly! You don't want missus to come and drag you back, do you? (*Sits in armchair.*)

MARY ANN (*shudders*). No, sir. Then I'll put one of your labels on it. (*Ties a label while canary sings. The bell rings outside, mingling with the singing.*) Oh, please, sir, I must go. (*Crosses to L.*)

LANCELOT. All right, child, run away!

MARY ANN (*at door, drawing off her gloves, returns*). Oh, Mr. Lancelot!

LANCELOT. Well? (*Rises and moves to table. The bell goes again.*)

MARY ANN. I feel as if she is dragging me away from you.

LANCELOT (*kindly*). Nonsense, nonsense! (*Touches her hair.*)

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot, I'm all of a shiver!

LANCELOT. I don't wonder—with that miserable thin dress. (*Touching it.*) But you won't wear that much longer, thank goodness.

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir, and—(*ecstatically*)—Spring is coming, too. (*The bell clangs. Her face changes. She shivers violently.*)



Oh, Mr. Lancelot, it sounds so angry. (*Runs to him as if for protection.*) If she should have found out!

LANCELOT. Nonsense! Unless you've been silly.

MARY ANN. No, sir, but please, sir, I don't want to go down. I feel as if I shall never see you again.

LANCELOT. Crybaby! I'm not going till the morning. Why, even to-morrow—(*smiling*)—you'll bring me my breakfast.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir, and—(*ecstatically*)—I'll do your boots!

LANCELOT. Ah, that reminds me—you might brush my clothes—I'm going out to-night with Peter.

MARY ANN. Thank you, sir. (*Runs behind screen.*)

LANCELOT. Dear little Mary Ann! It will be nice to rescue her from this drudgery. (*Stops and examines the music box.*) How neatly she's corded it. She will be very useful. (*Moves to fireplace. There is a knock.*) Come in!

(*ROSIE enters.*)

ROSIE. Is Mary Ann here?

LANCELOT. Yes, she is getting out my clothes.

ROSIE (*going towards screen*). Mary Ann!

(*MARY ANN appears from behind screen.*)

You must come at once—most particular.

MARY ANN (*advancing, carrying dress clothes in bare hands*). Yes, miss.

(*Exeunt ROSIE and MARY ANN; the latter, holding the clothes, looks back at LANCELOT with the same pitiful sense of being dragged away.*)

LANCELOT (*moving to canary*). Well, Dick, so you are going back to the country!

CANARY. Sweet, sweet, etc.

LANCELOT. Yes. I'd be as happy as you if only I had Brahms's wretched song off my mind. (*Pulls paper of words out of pocket—reads.*) "Adieu and farewell!" (*Puts it on piano rack, sits down and runs his hands over the keys, muttering.*) What a blessing to be done with it and Mrs. Leadbatter together! (*Sings.*)

"One kiss, my dear, farewell!"

Oh, if I could only get Peter's treacle out of my head! (*Tries a bar or two. It still comes rather like "Good-night and Good-bye."*)

PETER (*outside*). May I come in?

LANCELOT. Talk of the treacle—

(*He gets up. PETER enters. He wears an overcoat over his evening dress.*)

PETER (*L.C.*). Nobody seems to be about—and the hall door was wide open—what's up?

LANCELOT (C.). Nothing that I'm aware of. What brings you? Our dinner off?

PETER. No fear! I've just dropped in on my way to our Belgravian branch, to remind you. Lady Chelmer has summoned me suddenly.

LANCELOT. Lady Chelmer?

PETER. Oh, did I never tell you of the society personage who recommends our tea to the peerage?

LANCELOT. Awful!

PETER. Awful? It's lovely tea. Ask your brother! Well, good-bye. My cab's waiting. Glad you hadn't forgotten!

LANCELOT. Forgotten! Instead of eternally tossing up—chops or steaks—I'm quite looking forward to a civilized meal.

PETER. That's jolly—because I've got some pretty women to meet you——

LANCELOT (*veered—rises*). Oh, shan't we be alone? Why didn't you say so? (*Sarcastic*.) Are they tea dealers or adorers of treacle?

PETER. Shut up! All crazy to meet you.

LANCELOT (R.C.). Me? You must have been gassing!

PETER. Well, why shouldn't I be proud to be a pal of the coming genius?

LANCELOT. Coming! (*Points to paper on piano*.) "Adieu and farewell." The *going* genius.

PETER. Of course it'll go. But that's just tuning up. Wait! Miss Brooke—Miss Brooke (*impressively*)—was saying (*imitating her mincing accents*), "How ripping it would be to bring out an opera of your friend's at Covent Garden!"—she's the daughter of Brooke, the Copper King, you know.

LANCELOT. What! You villain! (*Advances threateningly*.) Is it matrimonial designs upon me you've got now?

PETER. Don't rumple my jewelled shirt! You shall sit next to Lady Lucy, who hasn't a penny. May I have a whisky-and-soda?

LANCELOT. Help yourself! (*PETER does so from the syphon and whisky on the table*.) I wonder, Peter, you've not married, surrounded by all these adorers. (*Crosses to piano*.)

PETER. All what adorers? Nobody knows I'm Keeley Lesterre.

LANCELOT. Then I shall tell Lady Lucy.

PETER (*nearly choking as he drinks*). For Heaven's sake! That would do for me altogether. So long as the dear creatures don't see me they can go on adoring me. Now with you—— (*Drinks*.)

LANCELOT. So long as they don't hear me—— (*Sits at piano*.)

PETER. Rubbish! Everybody hasn't got donkey's ears. (*Looks at piano*.) Ah, Brahmsen's imitation egg. I'm glad you're hatching that! Shan't interrupt you. Au revoir! (*Hastens to door*.)

LANCELOT. Auf Wiedersehen! (*Still sitting at piano and playing*.)

PETER (*looking around with hand on door handle*). Don't have an

attack of inspiration and forget to dress—you've only half an hour. (*Looking at watch.*)

LANCELOT (*playing softly*). Don't worry! (*Feeling for the desired tune of "Adieu and farewell."*) Mary Ann is brushing my togs now. It will be nice to talk to a woman of one's world again.

PETER. I'd better pick you up, all the same, on my way back. (*Opens door.*)

LANCELOT. As you will.

MRS. LEADBATTER'S voice (*in loud tones as from the parlour below*). Not another stroke of work do you do in my 'ouse, Mary Ann.

LANCELOT (*springing up*). What's that?

PETER. Only poor Mary Ann getting into a row.

(*Sounds of MARY ANN'S sobs.*)

LANCELOT. Is that she crying?

PETER (*half outside*). I'm afraid so. (*Sobs outside.*) Poor little thing. And she won't take my half-crowns. Well, I must fly—my Belgravian branch will be closing.

(*Exit and bangs door.*)

LANCELOT. What has happened? (*Paces up and down—MARY ANN'S sobs are faintly heard. After awhile he opens the door and listens.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*from outside—now nearer as from the passage*). Not a word about 'im all this time. Oh, the sly little baggage! Who could hever 'ave believed it?

(*LANCELOT closes door, terror-stricken.*)

LANCELOT. The little silly has gone and given it all away. What the devil am I to say? (*Paces again.*) I'd better face the music. (*Opens door and calls down.*) Is that you, Mrs. Leadbatter? What's all this noise about? I can't work.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*speaking up the stairs*). And who can work, I should like to know, with such goings on? I'm glad there's the clergyman 'ere to tell 'er what's right.

LANCELOT (*staggering back*). The clergyman?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*oily voice from below*). I'm sorry, sir, to have interfered with your work, but—

MRS. LEADBATTER (*outside—below*). Yes, you go hup sir, and tell him the rights and wrongs of it.

LANCELOT. O Lord! (*Paces to and fro.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*near door*). May I come in?

LANCELOT. De-de-lighted.

(*Enter REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE, closely followed by MRS. LEADBATTER.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. The Rev. Samuel Smedge, at your service.

LANCELOT. I want no services. Be seated, pray—I mean please.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Thank you. (*Looks around, selects the chair L. of table and sinks voluptuously into it.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. The 'oly gentleman is the vicar from Mary Ann's village.

LANCELOT. Ah, the kangaroo! Er—a nasty cold day. (*Pokes the fire with shovel.*) Er—will you have a drink, Mr. Smudge? I mean Smedge.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. You're very kind. A glass of water.

LANCELOT (*looks around*). I—I'm afraid there's only soda-water.

(LANCELOT rings bell.)

MRS. LEADBATTER (*crosses to R.C.*). Oh, no, sir, you mustn't, sir. Mary Ann's hoff.

LANCELOT. Off? (*Drops shovel.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Hoff duty for ever.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Never mind—soda-water will do.

MRS. LEADBATTER. The sly little minx—do you think I can keep such a gal in my kitchen?

LANCELOT (*alarmed*). Such a girl? (*Takes up whisky bottle absent-mindedly.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. A gal as is goin' to 'ave 'er own norse and kerridge.

LANCELOT. Norse and kerridge? (*Puzzled—pours whisky absent-mindedly into the vicar's glass.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Our worthy friend means horse and carriage.

LANCELOT. Yes, but what does horse and carriage mean? (*Puts glass to syphon.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. I may be a hignorant woman, but I do know 'arf a million is enough for a norse and kerridge.

LANCELOT (*squirting soda over table*). Half a million?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Such in round figures in pounds sterling is the fortune our dear Mary Ann has come into.

LANCELOT. Mary Ann has come into a fortune? (*Dazedly hands glass to vicar.*) I hope that's not too weak for you.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*taking it with apparent abstraction*). Thank you. Yes, the dear child—(*drinks*)—has become a great heiress. (*Drinks to dregs and with glass still to mouth says*) It is a deep happiness—(*puts down glass*)—to all of us who have watched over her.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*hysterically*). I'm sure 'er own mother couldn't 'ave watched over 'er more, 'and and foot, the happle of my heye—heddicated 'er out of 'er country talk and kep' 'er out o' loose company, as you yourself, sir—(*to LANCELOT*)—can bear witness. (*Sits on musicbox.*)

LANCELOT. But where? How? Who?

MRS. LEADBATTER. 'Ow? 'Oo? 'E!

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*solemnly*). Her brother, Tom.

MRS. LEADBATTER. And never said a word about 'im, the sly little minx!

LANCELOT (*still dazed*). The wicked brother Tom?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*holding up hands of deprecation*). He is gone beyond our earthly judgment. He disturbed my sermons grievously by wilful coughing, but I forgive him freely. Our dearly beloved sister—(*waving hand*)—will make a better use of his half-million—under Providence—(*His hand descends rhetorically on his own heart as with suggestion Providence is he.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Amen!

LANCELOT. But where did he get all his money?

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Petroleum wells. I believe the technical expression is "he struck ile." I only heard from the American lawyers on Saturday night, and I tarried but to preach on Sunday, despite the anxiety of my flock that I should at once hasten to London. You see, all who knew her hunger grievously for their dear Mary Ann.

(*A knock. Enter ROSIE with dress clothes and awed demeanour.*)

ROSIE. You rang, sir? Miss Mary Ann is engaged. And I've brought your clothes.

LANCELOT. Thank you.

(*She puts them behind screen.*)

(*LANCELOT sits on table, swinging his legs nervously.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. And bring the 'oly gentleman some water, Rosie.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Pray, pray do not trouble. I find soda-water a most satisfactory substitute.

MRS. LEADBATTER (*to ROSIE, as she emerges from screen*). Is Miss Mary Ann left hoff yowling?

ROSIE. No, Ma!

MRS. LEADBATTER. Go and give 'er a cup of tea with a little sperrits in it.

(*ROSIE exits solemnly—never more to giggle.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Spirits!

MRS. LEADBATTER (*reassuringly*). Oh, I've always trained her up for duty, your 'oliness, and now hit's hall wasted. (*Wrings her hands and collapses on music-box.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*consolingly*). No, no, good work is never wasted.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Not wasted, your 'oliness? Ain't you taking 'er where there's no boots to black and no beds to make? Didn't I 'ave to drag the clothes brush from 'er 'and and tell 'er that she was a laidy? (*To LANCELOT.*) "'Ere's a suvrin, Mary Ann," says I, "go and buy yourself a decent dress and jacket. You can't go

with that good kind gentleman in the dirty print. And get a pair of gloves," says I. No sooner was the gloves out of my mouth than she busts like a water-pipe—

LANCELOT (*apprehensively—hurriedly*). Ah, her brother's death, no doubt.

MRS. LEADBATTER. My Rosie never had nobody to die and leave her money, poor dear child, hexcept me, please Gawd. (*Weeps.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Do not weep. You have done your duty by our dear Mary Ann, since I entrusted her to your loving care. What a comfort, sir, to see such goodness in lowly places.

LANCELOT (*looking down on MRS. LEADBATTER on the music-box—gruntingly*). Yes, yes.

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. Particularly when there is so much wickedness seated on high.

LANCELOT (*slipping down uneasily from table*). Yes, yes. (*With outstretched hands of farewell, walks to vicar, who shows no signs of going.*) Must you go? I'm so glad—I mean I'm so sorry! But I'm glad about Mary Ann.

(*MRS. LEADBATTER rises and crosses to L.C. behind table.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. The whole countryside is glad. In fact her return on Thursday afternoon will almost assume the dimensions of a fête.

LANCELOT (*crosses to C.*). You are not taking her till Thursday afternoon?

MRS. LEADBATTER. She couldn't go in that dirty print. (*Crosses to door L.*)

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE. In my foolish masculine way I did not think of clothes. Mrs. Smedge will be grievously disappointed at my return without the dear child. But I must journey up again to this roaring Metropolis, to and fro—to and fro—like a weaver's shuttle.

MRS. LEADBATTER. Oh, you can have Mr. Lancelot's bed to-morrow, and for to-night, your 'oliness—

REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE (*waving hand*). No—duty is duty. Good-bye till Thursday afternoon.

(*MRS. LEADBATTER opens door for him.*)

Thank you so much for the soda-water.

(*Exit REV. SAMUEL SMEDGE and MRS. LEADBATTER.*)

LANCELOT (*wiping his forehead*). Phew! (*Whistles.*)

CANARY (*reply to whistle*). Two, two. (*Gradually launches into jubilant melody.*)

(*LANCELOT walks to screen, but turns as if forgetting his intentions, strides silently, as in tumultuous thought, three times across the room, and at last turns upon the rapturous canary.*)

LANCELOT (*savagely*). Oh, you think you're going to have a golden cage, do you? (*Canary stops.*) Blind fate, showering her gifts on babes and sucklings! (*Stops awe-struck with sudden thought, in lower tones, sinking gradually to a whisper.*) Blind fate! Or is there a seeing Providence? Was Mary Ann right? And God made her! And watches over her! Was she right! (*Sinks broodingly into armchair. Buries head in hands.*)

(*A timid knock. No answer.*)

(*Enter MARY ANN carrying a tray with knife and fork, glass, plates, etc., which she places on chair left of table, while she slowly drags on her gloves. Her eyes are ringed with tears and she is shaken with suppressed sobs. She clears table, extracts white cloth from sideboard and lays it, every now and then stealing a pathetic glance at the immobile LANCELOT. At last an uncontrollably loud sob bursts from her.*)

LANCELOT (*jumps to his feet*). Mary Ann!

MARY ANN (*choking down sob*). Yessir.

LANCELOT (*rubbing eyes at sight of laid table and MARY ANN, as if he might have been dreaming*). Is it true—is it true—you have come into half a million?

MARY ANN. Yessir—and will you have steak or chops?

LANCELOT (*mechanically taking out coin and tossing it*). Heads steak, tails chops! (*Examines coin.*) Chops! (*Glumly.*) I've lost. I always lose! (*Suddenly recalling facts.*) Oh, but you mustn't! You mustn't wait on me any more—

MARY ANN. I shall always wait on you, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT (B.C.). But your vicar is taking you away on Thursday afternoon.

MARY ANN (*great burst of joy*). Not till Thursday afternoon? Then that will be easy, I shall be gone.

LANCELOT. Gone? Where?

MARY ANN. With you, sir. And will you have tomatoes or potatoes? (*Turns away and rummages in sideboard, kneeling.*)

LANCELOT (*petulantly*). Mary Ann!

MARY ANN (*looking up servant-like*). Yessir!

LANCELOT. Are you foolish?

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). No, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT. But you talk as if you were. You mustn't run away from the vicar just when he's going to get you your money. (*Sits on table.*)

MARY ANN (*rising—with cruel-stand*). But I don't want to go with the vicar. (*Moving towards him.*) You said you would take me.

LANCELOT (*retreating*). Yes—yes—but don't you understand that—that I can wait?

MARY ANN. Can't the vicar wait?

LANCELOT. Listen to me, Mary Ann. (*She places cruel sullenly on table.*)

MARY ANN. Yessir.

LANCELOT. You're a young woman, not a baby. Just strive to grasp what I'm going to tell you.

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Fumbles impatiently at gloves.*)

LANCELOT. You are now the owner of half a million—five hundred thousand pounds. Think of ten sovereigns, ten golden sovereigns like the one Mrs. Leadbatter gave you, then—(*stretches arms perpendicularly*)—ten times as much as that; then—(*heightens arms further*)—ten times as much as that, then—(*arms at widest*)—ten times as much as that, then—(*further widening being impossible, sweeps arms round the horizon*)—fifty times as much as all that. Do you understand how rich you are?

MARY ANN. Yessir, and will you have tomatoes or potatoes? Please, sir, tell me quick. Miss Rosie is outside and she might stop my going with you.

LANCELOT. But don't you see I can't—now?

MARY ANN (*moving L.*). Then I'll make it tomatoes, they go best with chops.

LANCELOT (*groaning*). She's hopeless. (*Turns away. A knock.*) Yes?

(*Enter ROSIE, not closing door. She moves and talks in same grave awe.*)

ROSIE. Ma instructs me to say, will you please not let Miss Mary Ann do anything menial.

LANCELOT (*R.C., grumpily*). Miss Mary Ann must please herself. Good-bye both of you, I've got to dress. (*Hastens behind screen.*) Oh, what an ass I am! (*Pops head around screen.*) I say, I don't want chops, I'm going out. (*Disappears.*)

ROSIE (*takes tray from chair*). Please go down, Miss Mary Ann, I'll clear.

MARY ANN. No.

(*MARY ANN makes for tray and seizes it. ROSIE endeavours to wrest it from her. Tug-of-war in grim silence, the latent jealousy of the two girls adding to its earnestness. The superior strength of ROSIE drags MARY ANN towards the open door. MRS. LEADBATTER appears on threshold. Holds up hands in horror.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Take off that cap, Miss Mary Ann.

(*Grabs for cap. MARY ANN puts up her hand and ROSIE staggers back with the tray. MRS. LEADBATTER hastens towards table to clear it. MARY ANN left in miserable defeat.*)

LANCELOT. You there, Mrs. Leadbatter? (*Throws muddy dress shoes around screen.*) Quick, please!

(*MARY ANN makes a desperate rush past MRS. LEADBATTER, who has plates, etc., in her hands, grabs shoes and disappears.*)



MRS. LEADBATTER (*paralysed*). The most hobstinate, hungrateful millionairess I hever 'ad in the 'ouse.

ROSIE (*solemnly*). Oh, Ma! (*Takes plates from Mrs. LEADBATTER and puts them on tray.*)

MRS. LEADBATTER. Well, so she is. Worse than Betsy Jemima. Keeps on 'er cap hout of spite—just to make the neighbours think I've halways hill-treated 'er and kep' 'er down. And I begged 'er to go and sit in the drorin'-room and fold 'er arms like a real laidy.

LANCELOT. Don't worry me. You make me crazy to-day. I've forgotten to wash.

MRS. LEADBATTER.—Just like that Jemima! She never washed. (*Helps with clearing.*) Rosy cheeks like a happle, but a worm hin-side—the way that 'ussy turned on me——

LANCELOT (*sputtering in water*). It was the worm that turned.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A worm! A wiper! A dirty wiper!

LANCELOT (*behind screen*). Yes, you might have given me a clean towel.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A clean towel!—when you're going to-morrow!

(*Exit ROSIE with laden tray. Mrs. LEADBATTER folds cloth.*)

LANCELOT (*behind screen*). I'm going to-night—I shall sleep at a friend's—I'll write you where to send my things.

MRS. LEADBATTER. A nice bother—packing up your hodds and hends—(*puts cloth in sideboard*)—before my new general comes in.

(*Grumbling exit.*)

LANCELOT. A general taking this room? What's happened to your lodgings? Swarming with heiresses and generals. But why don't they bring up my shoes?

(*Emerges nearly dressed. Rings bell by fireplace—after a brief interval occupied in dressing, enter MARY ANN.*)

MARY ANN. Please, sir—(*smiling*)—I dodged them both. (*Begins putting on gloves.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, hang your gloves, I want my shoes.

MARY ANN. I've only done one, sir.

LANCELOT. Well, be quick with the other—no—I mean—don't finish the other at all—no, I mean—er—oh, Donner und Blitzen! (*Rumples his hair.*)

MARY ANN. You'd better have your pen, sir.

LANCELOT. Oh, no, never again!

MARY ANN. Don't be roary, sir. Who's to do your boots in the cottage if not me?

LANCELOT. Mary Ann! (*Crosses to L.C.*)

MARY ANN. Yes, Mr. Lancelot.

LANCELOT. You're not going to a cottage, but to a fine manor house—like the squire's——

MARY ANN. Oh, are we, sir?

LANCELOT (*veered*). I'm talking of *your* manor-house—beautiful furniture, carpets, pictures—all bought with your money—do you understand?

MARY ANN. Please, sir, then couldn't the money run to a large farm instead, with lots of cows and pigs?

LANCELOT (*groans*). You can have fifty farms and legions of pigs.

MARY ANN (*in joyous wonder*). O-h-h! (*Weeping*.) Oh-h-h! (*Wipes eyes with apron.*)

LANCELOT (B.C.). What's up now?

MARY ANN. Feyther—I mean father would have been so happy. Meat every day and pudden on Sunday. (*With joyous transition.*) And could I have a piano?

LANCELOT. Yes, pigs, puddings, pianos, kangaroos even. All that the heart of maiden can desire. (*Moves up behind armchair B.*)

MARY ANN. And will you learn me to play?

LANCELOT. Ahem!—that's a little more difficult.

MARY ANN. I'll try so hard, sir.

LANCELOT. But—(*smiling forcedly*)—I may not be at the farm.

MARY ANN (*feverishly*). Oh, but you will. You will take me there instead of to the cottage.

LANCELOT (*moves to B.C.—with feigned playfulness*). No, I should be out of place among all those pigs.

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir, you wouldn't—

LANCELOT. Thank you. But I can't go to your farm.

MARY ANN. Then I'll come to your cottage.

LANCELOT. What! And leave all those pigs!

MARY ANN. Please, sir, you're the only one I want.

LANCELOT. Thank you, again, but don't you see that everything is altered?

MARY ANN. What's altered? You are here, and here be I.

LANCELOT. Ah, but it's a different *you*, now. (*Turns away.*)

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot. (*Seizes his hand.*)

LANCELOT. Yes, it is. You are somebody now. Before, no one cared or bothered about you—you were no more than a dead leaf whirling in the street.

MARY ANN (*clinging to him*). Yes, you cared—you bothered about me.

LANCELOT. Yes, yes, but now the world's eyes are on you—people will talk if you go away with me.

MARY ANN. Why will they talk? What harm shall I do them?

LANCELOT. It's yourself you will harm.

MARY ANN. No, sir, I shall be happy.

LANCELOT (*confused*). Yes, but—er—one day you will want—to marry.

MARY ANN. No, Mr. Lancelot, I don't want to marry. I don't ever want to go away from you.

LANCELOT (*coughing uneasily*). I see you understand I'm not going to marry you.

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT. And that I never intended to marry you?

MARY ANN. Yes, sir.

LANCELOT. But don't you see how—Oh! I'm a brute!

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir, you're not a music publisher.

LANCELOT. Worse.

MARY ANN. Oh, no, sir. You have made me so happy.

LANCELOT. Then remain so. To take you with me would be wicked.

MARY ANN. But you didn't mind being wicked before? (*Getting anxious.*)

LANCELOT. I'm not sure I mind now. (*Crosses to her, takes her hand.*) It's for your sake, Mary Ann. Be sensible and go back quietly on Thursday with the vicar.

MARY ANN (*tearfully*). But then I shan't know how to come to you.

LANCELOT (*drops her hand*). Absolutely hopeless. You *mustn't* come with me. Everybody will talk of you as they did of Tom.

MARY ANN (*sobbing*). I don't care. I was a dead leaf so long. Nobody ever bothered to call me wicked then. (*Sits sobbing L. of table.*)

LANCELOT. Hush! Hush! (*Goes to door L. and closes it more tightly.*) Understand once for all. Even if you were simple enough to go with me, I couldn't be rogue enough to take you. It would be doing you a terrible wrong.

MARY ANN. Why more so than before?

LANCELOT (*wincing*). You had better go downstairs—Mrs. Leadbatter will wonder—

MARY ANN (*frenziedly, comprehension of parting at last dawning*). You are going away without me! (*Clings to him.*)

LANCELOT. Hush! Hush!

MARY ANN (*shriekingly*). You are going away without me—I shall never see you again!

LANCELOT. Be sensible, Mary Ann. You are going to have a very happy life, all silks and satins—

MARY ANN. You won't take me with you!

LANCELOT (*losing his temper*). Don't you understand that that's impossible—unless—(*contemptuously*)—unless I marry you.

MARY ANN (*ceasing to sob—breathes plaintively*). Can't you marry me then?

LANCELOT. You know it's impossible.

MARY ANN. Why is it impossible?

LANCELOT. Oh, because—(*slowly*)—because—oh, it's impossible!

MARY ANN (*L.C.*). Why is it impossible? I should wait on you just the same.

PETER (*in a loud cheery voice outside as he knocks at the door*). Can I come in ?

(MARY ANN *frenziedly tears off her gloves, which she has gradually pulled on.*)

LANCELOT. Delighted, old chap. (*Moves to fireplace.*)

(*Enter PETER.*)

(*In a loud voice.*) And you'll bring up my shoes, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN (*chokingly*). Yessir.

(*Flits past PETER and exit.*)

PETER (*goes to piano, picks up a piece of LANCELOT's music*). Well, are you ready ?

LANCELOT. Only got to get into my shoes.

PETER (*as he studies the music*). Your shoes ? How I wish Keeley Lesterre was in them !

LANCELOT. Do you ? I feel like cutting my throat.

PETER (*still studying music*). Ah, these blues are the penalty of genius. But I'd pay it gladly to speak like this to the souls of men. (*Drops deliberately into chair L. of table.*) I'm only a merchant ; tea by day and tunes by night, and the tunes are only fit to be given away with a pound of the tea. Ah—(*tragically*)—when I think of the sacred fervour with which I set out for Leipsic ; the music throbbing at my heart—(*drops head disconsolately on hands*) the divine ambition— (*With sudden shriek as his fingers become aware of his face.*) I'm not shaved ! (*Jumps up.*)

LANCELOT (*laughing*). You can use my razor, old man.

PETER. Your razor, no thank you, I remember Leipsic. (*Goes to door.*) I'll find a barber's pole in a moment. Ah, here come your shoes.

(*Enter ROSIE through open door with shoes.*)

Shan't be five minutes.

(*Exit.*)

ROSIE. Miss Mary Ann requested me to bring you these.

(*Puts shoes near armchair. Solemn exit.*)

LANCELOT. Poor little Mary Ann ! (*The canary sings.*) Oh, Dick, Dick, what a foolish, adorable little mistress you've got ! (*Quoting tenderly.*) She would wait on me just the same ! But it is impossible, isn't it Dick ?

CANARY. Sweet, sweet !

LANCELOT. Ah, you don't think it so impossible. But you don't know the world, Dick, any more than your mistress. (*Kicks against music-box.*) And yet I might starve for all the world cares. And my songs might lie unknown for ever, rotting in this coffin.

(*Spurns music-box with foot.*) Have I the right to refuse them life, and wings and immortality? Have I the right to withhold happiness from Mary Ann? (*Falls into armchair and broods. Perceives shoes, and begins to kick off his slippers. Tries to put on shoe, it won't go.*) Wrong foot! (*Tries the other—it won't go.*) What the deuce! (*Inserts his hand.*) Something stuck in it—no wonder! (*Begins to pull it out, produces glove.*) A glove? (*Explores other foot and produces the fellow. Examines them, puzzled for a moment, then understands.*) Ah! Mary Ann's! She has sent me back my gloves. (*Half hysterically.*) How funny!

(*Puts shoes on. As he is finishing door opens, and enter MARY ANN. She jumps up. She tries to retreat.*)

MARY ANN. Please sir, I'm sorry—I thought you were gone with Mr. Peter. I heard the cab—so I came for my canary.

LANCELOT. Oho! You gave that to me!

MARY ANN (*joyously*). Would you really like it?

LANCELOT. I should love to have it.

MARY ANN. Then— (*Her face falls.*) No, I know it's not right.

LANCELOT (*puzzled*). Not right?

MARY ANN. If people part they have to give back the presents. I remember that from our village.

LANCELOT (*touched—smiling*). Then I'll buy the canary.

MARY ANN. Oh, I couldn't sell Dick! (*Goes up and brings cage to table c.*)

LANCELOT. Not for these gloves? (*Produces and dangles them.*)

MARY ANN (*L.C.*). Oh, do you think it wouldn't be wrong, Mr. Lancelot? I don't want to be wicked. You see as I was doin' your shoes, I was thinking of mother and Sally and our black pig, and the way the organ played in church, and all at once somehow I knew it was wicked to bother you any more instead of going to the vicar. And so I put the gloves back in your boots. You didn't think I don't want them, did you, sir? (*Kisses them fervidly.*) And I do understand why it's impossible for you to marry me—I'm not good enough for you, sir.

LANCELOT (*bowing his head*). No, Mary Ann, I'm not good enough for you. That's the truth, the bare truth—without gloves.

MARY ANN. I don't understand you, sir.

LANCELOT. Heaven forbid you should! We artists only really care for our art. If I were to marry you it would only be for your half-million. (*Crosses down R.*) I'm a pauper. And you may be the only person who will ever have heard my music.

MARY ANN. Oh, Mr. Lancelot, I'm so sorry. (*Crosses to him.*)

LANCELOT. I didn't mean to get your pity. I'm a man, and I dare say I shall pull through. But even at the best, before I get half a million sovereigns out of this box—(*Spurns music-box with his foot.*) Ah well! I'm not blaming you—it's a funny world.

So beware of men like me—poor and selfish. And when you *do* marry—

MARY ANN (*R.C., bursting into tears at last*). Oh, Mr. Lancelot! But I know I shall never marry anybody else.

LANCELOT. Hush! Hush! I thought you were going to be a good girl and not cry again. Dry your eyes now, will you?

MARY ANN (*choking down tears*). Yessir. (*Lifts apron.*)

LANCELOT. Here, take my handkerchief.

MARY ANN (*still sobbing*). Yessir. (*Wipes her eyes.*) But I won't marry anybody else.

LANCELOT. Ah, wait till they've taught you arts and graces and dressed you up in silks and fluffery—fortunately everything will help you to forget this nightmare of Mrs. Leadbatter's lodgings. Promise me you will *try* to forget.

MARY ANN. Yessir—if you will do *me* a favour.

LANCELOT. Certainly, my child, if I can. (*Takes her hand.*)

MARY ANN. You have the money, Mr. Lancelot, instead of me.

LANCELOT (*turning away.*) Now, now, Mary Ann, after talking so sensibly. Ask any other favour, not that.

MARY ANN. Then please, sir, would you—(*hesitates*)—play me “Good-night and Good-bye”?

(LANCELOT *kisses her hand. He plays the chorus softly and tenderly.*)

MARY ANN *in tears. PETER enters softly.*)

PETER. Bravo! Bravo! Best compliment you ever paid me in my life, Lancelot. And Mary Ann in tears. (*Going to her.*) Thank you too, Mary Ann. You can't refuse my half-crown *now*. (*Offers it.*)

MARY ANN (*very subdued*). Thank you very much, sir. (*Pockets it.*)

LANCELOT. Ha, ha, ha!

PETER (*puzzled*). What's the joke now? Oh, this white on my coat. (*Takes off overcoat.*) Brush this white off, Mary Ann, sharp!

(MARY ANN *takes it silently and goes behind screen.*)

(To LANCELOT.) Well, now you've been studying my song, I suppose Brahmsen—

LANCELOT. Never! Adieu and farewell. (*Great sweeping gesture.*) I must give Brahmsen his money back, so I'll be glad of the two hundred I lent you at Leipsic.

PETER (*overwhelmed*). Oh, Lancelot. I—

LANCELOT (*claps him on the back*). But I must draw the line at the fifty interest.

PETER. I dare say you're right—I'm only a tea-merchant.

(MARY ANN *reappears and helps him on with his coat.*)

Oh, but this will give you a free year for work! Oh, Lancelot—how glorious!

LANCELOT (*feverishly*). Yes, I must work—I must work. Come. I'm so glad I'm not alone to-night. (*Links arm in PETER'S.*) Yes, a free year for work—for work!

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Pause. MARY ANN stands stonily as they are heard descending the stairs and opening door. The door slams. Then she rushes to window and throws it open. Noise of cab driving off—she snaps down window, staggers blindly, tears streaming down her cheeks. She turns to canary cage on table C.*)

MARY ANN. Good-bye, Dick! Good-bye! You're his now. Good-bye, Dick. I shall never see you again. Take care of he. Sing to he. Don't let he be miserable. Sing to he. Sing to he.

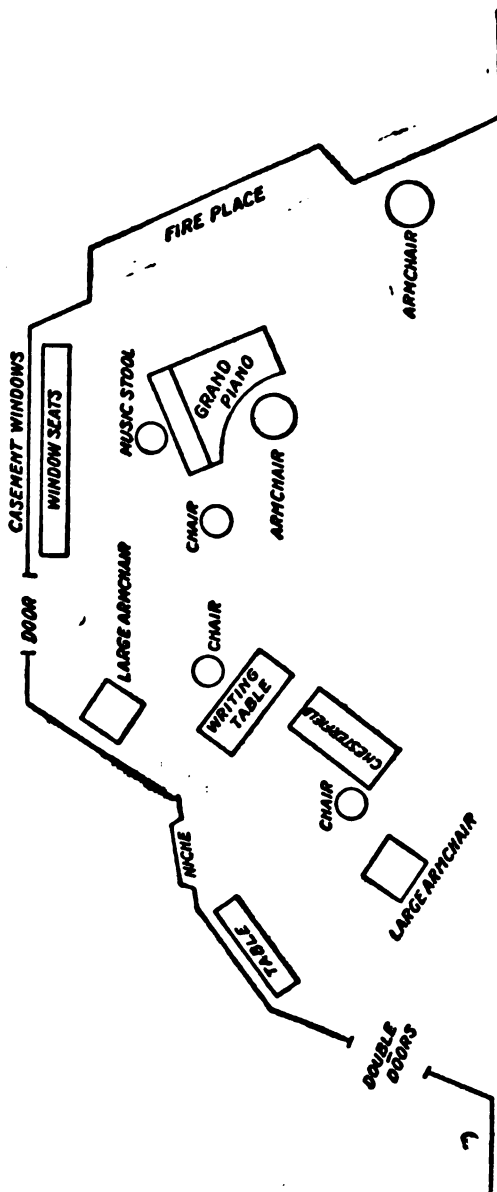
(*Falls against cage in a passion of tears.*)

CURTAIN.





# ACT 4. GARDEN BACKING-



## ACT IV

*Ere the rise of the curtain a voice is heard singing with entrancing pathos the opening bars of "Mariana in the Moated Grange," and as the curtain ascends, the HON. MRS. FITZGEORGE is discovered singing by the grand piano to the left of the drawing-room of Mead Manor Hall—which gives by the door in the back wall on the grounds and by doors B. to a corridor. LADY CHELMER, an elderly peeress, is playing the accompaniment. In the centre of the scene sits a smart society matron, LADY GLYNN. CAROLINE, the elderly COUNTESS OF FOXWELL, sits fast asleep, her daughter GLADYS is seated with ROWENA in a niche up B.C.*

MRS. FITZGEORGE (L.C., singing).

"She only said, my life is dreary;  
He cometh not, she said.  
She said, I am a-weary, a-weary;  
I would that I were dead."

(*At end of song general handclapping.*)

LADY FOXWELL (B.C., waking up and yawning). Ah, here come the men!

GLADYS (rises R.). No, mother; man cometh not, that's just what Mrs. Fitzgeorge has been singing.

LADY FOXWELL (as MRS. FITZGEORGE comes from piano towards centre). Ah, Mrs. Fitzgeorge, you sang that delightfully—such verve, such gaiety!

LADY CHELMER (L., comes towards centre, and shaking her finger at LADY FOXWELL). Caroline, you've been caught napping! (*Sits in armchair L.*)

LADY FOXWELL (*feebly*). It's so warm!

LADY GLYNN (*flippantly*). And so slow till the men come in. (*Sings*).

"I am a-weary, a-weary."

(SMEDGE heard coughing outside door.)

Ah, there is a man.

HOWARD. Mr. Samuel Smedge!

(*Enter SMEDGE, R.*)

LADY GLYNN (*sinking back*). No, there isn't!

SMEDGE. How do you do, Lady Chelmer? But where is our little Mary Ann?

LADY CHELMER (*puzzled*). Where is who?

SMEDGE (*coughing*). Ahem! Ahem! I said where is our little Marian? She asked me to drop in about her orphanage concert.

LADY CHELMER. How tiresome of her!

(SMEDGE *starts*.)

I mean anything to excuse her doing her duties as hostess. She's fled to the library now with the village schoolmistress.

SMEDGE. Good works, Lady Chelmer, are more than good dinners. I am deeply grateful that, though it must be some six years since Marian passed from under my wing, she still remains true to the teachings I endeavoured—

LADY FOXWELL (*inquisitively, eyeing him through lorgnette*). You knew Marian before she became Lady Chelmer's ward?

LADY CHELMER (*hastily*). Marian's family has been connected for generations with Mr. Smedge's former parish. (*Introducing*.) The Rev. Samuel Smedge, the Countess of Foxwell,—

(SMEDGE *bobs at every name*.)

—Lady Glynn, Mrs. Fitzgeorge, Miss Fitzgeorge, Lady Gladys Valentine.

SMEDGE (*overwhelmed*). Your Ladyships' obedient servant! Yes, I baptized dear Marian, and when Providence carried her to these parts, she could not rest until I had accepted a benefice in her gift. You see she has been almost a child of my own, never out of my sight, so to speak, except of course during her sojournings in the centre of fashion and luxury, whither a mere labourer in the rural vineyard could not follow her. It has been a great pleasure to watch her grow up—though of course the moment came when I felt that her wealth and talents grievously demanded the atmosphere that only a member of your esteemed order could supply; I count myself fortunate to have persuaded Lady Chelmer—

LADY CHELMER (*uneasily*). Yes, yes, everybody understands—

SMEDGE. In consideration of—

LADY CHELMER. Don't speak of it—I was only too glad.

SMEDGE. In consideration of—

(LADY CHELMER *coughs violently*.)

May I offer you a eucalyptus jujube?

LADY CHELMER. No, thank you, Marian will be expecting you.

SMEDGE. Thank you so much. As I was saying, in consideration of Marian's rich promise—

LADY CHELMER (*anxious to stop him*). You will find her in the library.

SMEDGE. Yes, that is where I always find her. And to see our

little Marian browsing among the old folios is most edifying, especially when one considers that for years her only schoolmistress——

LADY CHELMER (*sharply*). The schoolmistress is with her now. They are both expecting you about the concert arrangements.

SMEDGE. Dear me, yes, yes—I fly to the good work.

(*Hastens towards door. HOWARD enters with coffee.*)

Ah, I may as well wait for the coffee.

LADY CHELMER. Howard will bring it to you in the library.

SMEDGE. Thank you—that will be indeed a delightful combination, coffee and charity. (*Is going.*)

LADY CHELMER (*absently*). And Chartreuse. Certainly.

SMEDGE (*turning—severely*). I said charity, Lady Chelmer, coffee and charity.

LADY CHELMER. I beg your pardon.

LADY FOXWELL (*refusing HOWARD's tray*). No, thank you. I should lose my beauty sleep.

(*Suppressed amusement among other ladies. Business of handing coffee during ensuing scene.*)

SMEDGE (*coming back*). Ah, coffee keeps you awake, Countess. I have often wished it could be handed round among my congregation on sultry summer afternoons. (*Going out.*)

MRS. FITZGEORGE. What a barbarous idea!

SMEDGE (*coming back*). Barbarous, madam?

LADY GLYNN (*demurely*). Mrs. Fitzgeorge means that on sultry afternoons coffee would be cruelly hot.

SMEDGE. Ah, yes, I see. But in these days of long dinners and short sermons——

LADY GLYNN. Short sermons! I never heard a sermon that struck me as short—did you, Lady Foxwell?

LADY FOXWELL (*yawning*). I feel I rarely retain any sense of the passage of time.

SMEDGE. But people sit through thirteen-course dinners, whereas if I were to announce an exhortation under thirteen heads——

OMNES. Oh!

(*General shudder and groan.*)

MRS. FITZGEORGE. Pray don't—thirteen's an unlucky number.

LADY CHELMER (*to HOWARD*). Take Mr. Smedge's coffee to the library.

HOWARD. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit.*)

SMEDGE. The very farm-labourers, nowadays, try to ape their betters by yawning and shuffling. Even the pew-opener——

LADY CHELMER. You are keeping Marian waiting.

SMEDGE. That would be indeed a grievous, nay an unpardonable sin. (*Hastens to door.*) Au revoir, your ladyships, I trust we shall all meet on Sunday. (*Bows and exit—his head re-appears at door.*) Since you mentioned the Chartreuse—

(*Exit.*)

MRS. FITZGEORGE. What is this concert of Marian's?

LADY CHELMER. It is to build a country home for little London orphans.

GLADYS. Oh, mother! How good Marian is! I wish I could be like her.

LADY FOXWELL (*sighing*). I wish you could, my dear, you'd be rolling in money.

GLADYS. I'd rather be rolling in hay. Oh, those sweet little pigs Marian took us to see!

MRS. FITZGEORGE. Do you mean the village children?

ROWENA. Oh, no, mother. Six real little pigs that have lost their mother. How they did squeal!

LADY GLYNN. Quite an orphanage concert!

(*Laughter.*)

LADY CHELMER (*smiling*). You will all have to patronize Marian's. As for you, Caroline, we shall find you a specially soft stall to sleep in.

LADY FOXWELL (R.C.). Oh, you mustn't suppose I don't like music—why, I sat all through the opera of that new-fangled composer, what's his name, Lancelot, at Covent Garden—the night the King and Queen were there, and I'm sure I never slept a wink—not even afterwards. (*Yawns and relapses to sleepiness.*)

LADY CHELMER (L.). Poor dear Caroline—but all we want is your name on the list of patrons. A Countess always draws—*asleep or awake!* (*Laugh.*) Meantime Gladys shall play you a lullaby.

GLADYS. I don't see anything I know.

(*ROWENA and GLADYS examine music on niche.*)

LADY GLYNN (*rising, coming down to LADY CHELMER*). How many tickets will you let me off with? I don't mind giving you my Sunday bridge winnings.

LADY CHELMER (L.). Bridge on Sunday! (*Horried.*)

LADY GLYNN (*crosses to piano—in laughing apology*). Oh, charity covereth a multitude of wins! Look at Mrs. de Courcy, who was once actually caught cheating, and now she opens hospital bazaars and is the pink of propriety.

LADY FOXWELL (*waking up sharply, R.C.*). The pink of propriety—the rouge of propriety, I should call her.

(*Laughter of the group of matrons.*)

MRS. FITZGEORGE. But I thought she was so good—worked in the East End and all that.

LADY GLYNN (C.). My dear, the East End is the only place where you can be sure of not meeting your husband. What do you suppose takes the young Countess of Darley to Whitechapel three times a week? And why does Mrs. Van Rossiter—

(*MARIAN appears at the door at the back. LADY GLYNN, though neither seeing nor hearing her, seems to feel the presence of innocence, stops abruptly and looks round. All look round.*)

LADY CHELMER (to MARIAN). Have you finished with Mr. Smedge already?

MARIAN. Yes—he was anxious to see a man in the dining-room.

LADY GLYNN (with forced gaiety). We must rout them all out. Who volunteers?

MRS. FITZGEORGE. All right, I'm with you.

LADY GLYNN. Come along, then. Cheer up, Lady Foxwell. We'll man the drawing-room.

(*Exeunt LADY GLYNN and MRS. FITZGEORGE R.*)

MARIAN. Oh, Auntie, it's a sin to be indoors. Come out, Rowena and Gladys. The very moonshine is like a mist of white roses. Won't you come too?

LADY CHELMER. I should catch cold, dear. Besides, I must remain at my post if you desert yours. I expect one or two more people—

MARIAN. More people! Oh dear! Then we must get back soon. Come, children, let us make hay while the moon shines.

(*The three girls exeunt. LADY FOXWELL goes up after them, then returns C.*)

LADY FOXWELL (R.C., *uneasily*). Whom are you expecting, Angela?

LADY CHELMER (L.C.). Ah, that's a secret I have kept from Marian herself. Such a pleasant surprise for her!

LADY FOXWELL (R.C.). Who, in Heaven's name?

LADY CHELMER (L.C.). Curiously enough the very man you just mentioned.

LADY FOXWELL. I mentioned no man!

LADY CHELMER. Yes, Caroline, the composer whose opera kept you awake.

LADY FOXWELL (R.C.). Lancelot?

LADY CHELMER (L.C.). Yes, Marian adores his music. That very opera of his, *Maid Marian*—(*crosses to R.C.*)—curious I never noticed before her name was in it—that new opera was the only thing that drew her up to town last season. Imagine what a delightful surprise it will be for her to make the lion's actual acquaintance, and

what a still more delightful surprise to learn that he's consented to organize our Orphanage Concert! (*Crosses R.*)

LADY FOXWELL (*drops into chair in curve of piano L.C.*). Oh, Angela, is that fair to Valentine?

LADY CHELMER. Fair to Lord Valentine!

LADY FOXWELL. Yes, you promised that to-night you would give my boy a chance of proposing to Marian.

LADY CHELMER. And so I will, Caroline—for the sake of our old friendship, but I tell you candidly he hasn't the ghost of a chance.

LADY FOXWELL. We shall see—she's only a squire's daughter, you say.

LADY CHELMER (*coughs uneasily*). Ahem! yes— (*Drops into chair R.*)

LADY FOXWELL. And my Tom brings her an ancient title. His is just the full rich nature she needs to supplement hers.

LADY CHELMER. And hers is just the full rich bank balance he needs to supplement his.

LADY FOXWELL. Don't be vulgar, Angela. How can you mention Marian's money! Ugh! it gives me a shiver of jealousy all down my spine. Oh dear! What's the good of being a Countess with nothing to count? (*Buries head in hands.*)

LADY CHELMER (*going to her tenderly*). My poor dear Caroline! Haven't I been through it all? Didn't I even have to push Peter's tea in Belgravia before Marian saved me from my sins of commission?

LADY FOXWELL (*looking up*). Peter's tea! I never heard of it.

LADY CHELMER (*laughing*). Oh, but you've drunk it. And Peter is even better than his tea. I'm sorry I lost sight of him for so many years. It was he who, when we met by chance in town, promised to get me the great Lancelot.

LADY FOXWELL. But does this Peter supply composers as well as tea?

LADY CHELMER. No, no. (*Laughing.*) He is Lancelot's friend, and so he's bringing him down to-night to arrange details.

LADY FOXWELL (*burying her head again*). Oh, I feel as though my poor boy were being thrown to the lion.

LADY CHELMER (*going up to writing-table R.C.*). Lord Valentine as a Christian martyr! Ha! ha! ha! Don't be alarmed, Caroline. Your boy shall have his chance. Mr. Lancelot isn't even staying with us. Lions appear to love village inns and sawdust.

LADY FOXWELL (*rising*). But these young girls are so silly. Don't you remember the feminine craze for Keeley Lesterre? That fashion went out with bishop sleeves, and this season Lancelot is all the rage.

LADY CHELMER. Pooh! As if Marian—

LADY FOXWELL. In any case the creature's turning up will spoil the tête-à-tête we were contriving for Val—

LADY CHELMER. Hush! here come the girls!

*(Enter the three girls.)*

MARIAN *(clapping hands childishly as she perceives no new-comers)*. Hurrah! We can take another turn.

LADY CHELMER. No, don't go. Gladys was about to play.

GLADYS. Not before Marian! She's such an authority on music.

MARIAN. I? Oh, Gladys!

ROWENA. Well, you are an authority on Lancelot's music.

MARIAN *(agitated)*. Oh, nonsense! Er—*(pretending to catch sight of coffee cup)*—is this my coffee? *(Pushes electric button on wall.)*

ROWENA. I do hope Lancelot will write music to Shakespeare, because now that we have a great English composer——

GLADYS *(up L.)*. Yes, and wouldn't it be lovely if Lancelot would interpret Browning?

ROWENA *(L.C.)*. Ah! the "Last ride together"—how Lancelot would revel in that, Marian!

GLADYS *(coming c.)*. Yes, and how the tone-poet of "Meadow-sweet" would translate the lyric of the English April——

LADY FOXWELL *(L.C.)*. Lancelot! Lancelot! All lost their heads over Lancelot and all talking of the man as if he was their brother! Why has he only a Christian name? The fellow's a charlatan.

LADY CHELMER. Oh, Caroline, I hear he's a baronet's son.

MARIAN *(sitting c.)*. A composer has a right to use any pen-name he pleases. Besides, he was always known as Mr. Lancelot, even in his days of obscurity.

*(Enter HOWARD.)*

LADY FOXWELL *(alarmed)*. Yes, and nice tales I hear of those same shady days. He may have been a baronet's son, but he was disinherited for his gambling and extravagance.

MARIAN. As he was a younger son, he could scarcely have been disinherited.

LADY CHELMER. You seem very well up in Mr. Lancelot's biography.

MARIAN. I read the papers, Auntie, like everybody else. These tales are false. *(Perceiving HOWARD.)* This coffee is cold, another cup, please.

*(Exit HOWARD.)*

Mr. Lancelot's only extravagance was burning his landlady's gas all night, his only gambling was tossing for chops or steaks, and rather than write for the debased taste of his time, Mr. Lancelot lived in one room.

LADY FOXWELL *(interrupting)*. Oh, yes, that's all advertisement—I wonder an intelligent girl like you can be taken in by these newspaper paragraphs.



MARIAN. That wasn't in the papers—I know it—personally.

LADY CHELMER (*alarmed. Rises—crosses to* LADY FOXWELL L.C.) Now, my dear, you know that is impossible.

MARIAN (*defiantly*). I heard him play his music when he was poor and struggling.

GLADYS. Oh, how interesting! (*Crosses to c. Sits beside* MARIAN.)

(*Re-enter* HOWARD *with coffee.*)

Do tell us about it, Marian, there's a darling. Did he come and see you?

MARIAN. I used to give him tea. (*Taking coffee from* HOWARD.)

GLADYS. And did he take sugar and milk like an ordinary mortal?

ROWENA. And did he confide in you?

GLADYS. And was he clean-shaven?

ROWENA. And did he call himself Lancelot?

GLADYS. And did he wear his hair long?

ROWENA. And was he in love with anybody?

(*The questions tumble out one on top of another.*)

LADY FOXWELL (*seated R.—suspiciously—putting up lorgnette*). And where was all this?

LADY CHELMER (*alarmed—nervously fanning herself*). Ah, I remember now—of course—he was Marian's music master before he was famous.

ROWENA. Oh, how nice for Marian!

GLADYS. I suppose he was one of those delightful monsters of music masters who roar at you if you make a mistake.

MARIAN (*laughing*). Yes, he could roar. But he roared more at Rosie.

LADY FOXWELL (*L.—sharply*). Who was Rosie?

MARIAN. One of his pupils.

LADY CHELMER (*L.C., anxiously*). The Duchess of Danbury has a Rosie.

MARIAN. No, it wasn't that Rosie.

LADY CHELMER. Ah, I recollect dear—I think I have heard you speak of Rosie—her mother entertained a good deal, I believe.

MARIAN (*smiling*). Yes. In fact, it was at one of her house-parties that I first met Mr. Lancelot.

LADY FOXWELL (*sharply*). How long were you under him?

MARIAN. Only a month or two.

LADY CHELMER (*intervening*). Ah, no wonder I had forgotten. And I hope he has forgotten you, dear.

MARIAN. Why, Auntie? What does it matter? We shall never meet.

LADY CHELMER (*L.C., coughing uneasily*). Ahem! Well—if you do—you mustn't remind him he was once merely a music-master.

MARIAN (*rises*). And merely a baronet's son! You are quite right, Auntie. (*Turns away and stares out of door towards the moon.*)

(ROWENA and GLADYS move down R.)

LADY CHELMER (C., *sotto voce*). And you're quite right, Caroline. I'll send a note to Peter not to bring him.

LADY FOXWELL (L., *sotto voce*). Oh, do, Angela!

(LADY CHELMER goes to writing-table and writes. *There is no break in the conversation.*)

GLADYS. I wish I could play his music better—but I'm so lazy! (*Fans herself.*) Marian, did you ever do any work with the brush?

MARIAN (*turning with faint smile from door*). Oh, yes, heaps!

LADY CHELMER (*looking back agitatedly from the writing-table, quill in hand*). Did you? The dear child keeps her accomplishments hidden.

MARIAN. Before I lived with you, Auntie, I worked every day with the brush most industriously. I have since thought my work lacked soul, though there was a good deal of polish. (*Comes down to C. a little.*)

(LADY CHELMER resumes writing.)

ROWENA. And did you have a studio with a top light?

(LADY CHELMER looks up uneasily.)

MARIAN (C.). Oh, a sort of studio on the top floor.

GLADYS (*clapping her hands girlishly*). What fun! And could you work in oil?

(LADY CHELMER resumes writing.)

MARIAN. Oh, yes.

(LADY CHELMER alarmed again.)

Generally still life.

(LADY CHELMER resumes writing.)

ROWENA. Ah, fruit and flower pieces!

MARIAN. No, fish and meat——

LADY CHELMER (*alarmed again*). Ah, like the Dutch school. (*Rings bell.*)

GLADYS. But I suppose you chiefly worked in water.

MARIAN. A good deal in water, and a good deal in charcoal.

(*Enter HOWARD R.*)

LADY CHELMER. Send that to the Inn at once!

HOWARD. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit R.*)

LADY FOXWELL (*rising*). Marian seems quite an Admirable Crichton in the arts. For my part I belong to the old generation, and I think——

GLADYS. Oh, mother!

LADY FOXWELL. Oh, yes, Gladys, I know I'm talking heresy—but I think girls should be first of all good housekeepers. (*Goes up.*)

MARIAN. I quite agree with you, Lady Foxwell. (*Walks to piano, sits on stool, takes off her gloves, and touches keys idly.*)

(LADY FOXWELL joins LADY CHELMER up L.C.)

(*Enter LORD VALENTINE, a gilded youth, wearing a monocle and slightly limping. The other ladies brisk up perceptibly.*)

LADY CHELMER. Alone, Lord Valentine?

LORD VALENTINE. Yes—Lady Glynn and Mrs. Fitzgeorge romped in and carried off some of us to play billiards—the parson was holding forth to the others, so I thought I'd let him have a free run. (*Limps to MARIAN and bends over her.*)

LADY FOXWELL (*aside to LADY CHELMER*). I don't like these modern manners—carrying off the men—such selfishness! But it will give my boy his chance.

MARIAN (*still touching keys softly*). Your ankle is not still troubling you, I hope, Lord Valentine?

LORD VALENTINE (*in low confidential tone*). Thank you, no. Your sympathy is superior to arnica, you see. But I'd like to wring that confounded chauffeur's neck. You see I was crawling down the hill—oh, quite under forty miles an hour——

(*Dumb show talk.*)

LADY FOXWELL. Gladys, Rowena, Lady Chelmer proposes we should all walk in the grounds and see—(*signals with her fan and nods meaningly*)—what was it you said we should see, Angela?

LADY CHELMER (*taking the hint*). Was it the tarragon you had never seen growing?

LADY FOXWELL. Of course, of course. Gladys, Rowena, (*marshalling them*) Lady Chelmer is going to show us the tarragon—(*Pointedly.*) Marion knows it, of course.

ROWENA (*going up with GLADYS*). Oh, how kind! I should like to see so rare and romantic a herb. But won't you catch cold, Lady Chelmer?

LADY CHELMER. No, no, dear, it seems so much warmer.

GLADYS. But we can't see it very well by night.

LADY FOXWELL. Not in this wonderful moonlight?

LADY CHELMER. It isn't so much the sight—it is the peculiar taste—— (*Chivying them out, aided by LADY FOXWELL.*)

(*Exeunt OMNES into grounds except LORD VALENTINE and MARIAN.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*up stage*). Oh, I'm so glad they've left the course clear!

MARIAN (*bored*). Ah, you don't like society, Lord Valentine?

LORD VALENTINE. Not me. Give me a snug little car for two; can't stand drags.

MARIAN (*bored*). Ah, drags! (*Yawns. Embarrassed pause.*)

LORD VALENTINE. Er—er—have you ever driven a motor-car?

MARIAN (*face lighting up at prospect of amusing herself*). No, only a milk-cart.

LORD VALENTINE (*dropping eyeglass*). A milk-cart!

MARIAN (*with pretended astonishment*). Haven't you ever seen a milk-cart?

LORD VALENTINE. Yes: often—on my way home from supper. But whatever made you drive a milk-cart?

MARIAN. My father. I milked the cows myself.

LORD VALENTINE. Milked the cows! Whatever did you milk the cows for?

MARIAN. For the milk. Suppose we join the others? (*Rises from piano.*)

LORD VALENTINE. But you've seen the beastly tarraboom.

MARIAN (*with pretended naïveté*). Tarragon! It is not beastly; it's used for flavouring vinegar.

LORD VALENTINE. Vinegar! (*Makes wry mouth.*) No, I won't go—I can't connect you with vinegar. I can only connect you with sugar and spice, you know.

MARIAN. Really, Lord Valentine?

LORD VALENTINE (*encouraged*). I say—(*adjusting eyeglass*)—I wish you wouldn't call me *Lord Valentine*.

MARIAN (*pretended naïveté*). Oh, have I got your title wrong?

LORD VALENTINE. No, no, I mean, let me be Valentine—your Valentine! (*She shakes her head.*) Well then Tom—just your Tommy, eh? And let me call you Marian, merely Marian.

HOWARD (*throwing open doors and ushering in visitors*). Mr. Lancelot!

(*Enter LANCELOT, followed by PETER.*)

(*MARIAN starts, mechanically picks up gloves lying on top of piano.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*simultaneously*). D—n! Why don't they toot? (*Crosses down L.*)

HOWARD (*announcing*). Mr. Peter— (*Pauses dubiously.*) I beg your pardon, sir?

PETER. Yes, never mind. Just Peter.

HOWARD (*repeating announcement*). Mr. Peter.

MARIAN (*who has just recovered her composure during this brief colloquy, advances, holding gloves in left hand*). How do you do, Mr. Lancelot? The composer, I presume? So pleased to know you. Had no idea you were in these parts. How do you do, Mr. Peter? Pretty country, is it not? You must excuse my aunt a moment;

she has gone into the grounds—she will be so sorry—won't you sit down?—I will call her. (*Goes to casement, evidently anxious to escape and conceal her emotion.*)

LORD VALENTINE. Shall I help you find her?

MARIAN. No, thank you, Lord Valentine—your ankle—I know my way to the tarragon. (*Drops gloves from left hand.*)

(*PETER is down R.*)

LANCELOT (*rushing forward to pick them up*). Your gloves!

MARIAN (*taking them*). Oh, thank you. Lord Valentine, won't you entertain my aunt's friends?

(*Exit.*)

(*LANCELOT stands rapt looking after her.*)

PETER. What a lovely girl!

LORD VALENTINE (L.C.). I should say so. Best British make. The French may be better for a sprint—but for absence of noise and vibration, and reliable steering apparatus, the native article takes the cup.

LANCELOT (C., *turning*). Who is she?

PETER (*down R.*). You heard her say—Lady Chelmer's niece.

LORD VALENTINE. Oh, she isn't really.

LANCELOT. Not really? (*Coming down.*)

LORD VALENTINE (C.). She's an orphan; but Lady Chelmer was a friend of the squire—her father, don't you know?

LANCELOT (*blankly*). Oh!

LORD VALENTINE. And so she steers Marian.

LANCELOT (*convulsively*). Marian?

LORD VALENTINE (C.). What's exploded?

PETER (*laughingly*). Nothing! Nothing! Mr. Lancelot wrote an opera called *Maid Marian*, so the name always excites him.

LORD VALENTINE (L.C.). Oh, are you that Lancelot! My mother dragged me to the trial performance.

(*LANCELOT, embarrassed, sits at table and takes up book.*)

PETER (R.). You don't seem pleased!

LORD VALENTINE (*smiling*). Well, the pace was a bit slow, wasn't it? But then I'm no referee, for I can't tell "God save the King" from "The girl I left behind me," except by the people taking off their hats, so Mr. Lancelot mustn't mind.

LANCELOT. No, no, certainly not! You say Lady Chelmer steers her—

LORD VALENTINE. Yes, but— (*With complacent significance.*) She'll have a licensed driver soon.

LANCELOT. Ah!

LORD VALENTINE. Do you mind if I go and see if she's run into anything—she hasn't lit up?

(*Exit through the door into the garden.*)

PETER (*crosses over to piano*). Well, I don't think Maid Marian is to be congratulated on her choice.

LANCELOT. Oh, I rather like the motor-maniac. He's the only man who hasn't gushed over *Maid Marian*.

PETER. He has the real thing to gush over.

LANCELOT (*rising*). I don't think I'll wait for Lady Chelmer—

PETER (*alarmed*). Not wait?

LANCELOT. I feel a beastly wave of the blues coming on—it's the sight of these society people, these Philistine butterflies—

PETER (L.). But the concert for the orphanage?

LANCELOT (C.). I'm sorry I promised. Why are you so grateful to Lady Chelmer? Did she boom "Good-night and Good-bye"?

PETER. Don't speak ill of the dead. It was our tea she boomed, and although I have scarcely seen her since our Belgravian branch shut up when she came into money five or six years ago, still—

(*Enter HOWARD with a note.*)

HOWARD. Beg pardon, sir, but this note from her Ladyship has been sent after you from the inn.

(PETER takes it. *Exit* HOWARD.)

PETER (*reads it*). What's this? Lady Chelmer is in bed with raging neuralgia. Oh! (*Disgusted.*) And I did think that woman was truthful.

LANCELOT. What! When she boomed your tea! (*Crosses to R.*)

PETER (*angrily*). Let us clear out immediately.

LANCELOT. I suggested sooner. (*Both start towards door.*)

(*Re-enter MARIAN from the grounds.*)

MARIAN. I am so sorry—my aunt begs you to excuse her—she—

PETER (*witheringly—R.C.*). Oh, certainly, I trust her neuralgia is less raging.

MARIAN (C., *with genuine innocence*). Oh, how did you know? It has just come on through her being in the night air. She has gone to her room. She hopes to arrange about the concert in the morning. How good it is of Mr. Lancelot to help my orphans! I did not know.

(*Re-enter LORD VALENTINE from the grounds.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*crosses to R. of MARIAN*). Ah, there you are! I've been all over the course.

MARIAN. Instead of entertaining Lady Chelmer's friends? (*Turns to him, dumb show talk.*)

PETER (R.C.—*sotto voce*). Come on, Lancelot.

LANCELOT. Not yet. (R., *behind Chesterfield.*)

PETER. But your fit of the blues!

LANCELOT. It's going.

PETER. So am I—I won't be insulted.

LANCELOT. You're a blithering imbecile! Take the chauffeur round the course. I want to talk to this girl.

PETER (R.C.). Oh, you geniuses! Every day a new face. (*Goes to casement. Aloud.*) What a lovely full moon, Lord Valentine!

LORD VALENTINE (C.). Yes, like a Rolls Royce. Wouldn't you like to take your friend into the grounds and see the tarragon blooming?

MARIAN (L.C.). Nonsense! The tarragon isn't blooming.

LORD VALENTINE (C.). Well, taste the blooming tarragon—I mean taste the tarragon.

MARIAN. No, no, Lord Valentine. You mustn't inflict your hobbies on Lady Chelmer's friends. I'm sure they'd much rather join the others in the billiard-room.

LANCELOT. Oh, but my friend is an enthusiast on tarragon, aren't you, Peter? You're always talking of tarragon—tarragon and motor-cars.

PETER. I am always delighted to taste tarragon—or curse motor-cars. But! I'm rather blind in the dark. Won't you give me your arm? (*Seizes LORD VALENTINE's arm and drags him towards casement.*)

LORD VALENTINE (*desperately*). I—I—can't walk—my ankle—

MARIAN (*anxious not to be alone with LANCELOT*). Yes—yes—we will come too. (*Moving.*)

(*Exeunt LORD VALENTINE and PETER into the grounds.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, please!

(*She stops.*)

Don't let us interfere with these two congenial souls—tarragon and a tooter is all they ask to make them happy.

MARIAN. Then let us join the rest of the world in the billiard-room. We can get to it through the grounds. (*Moves again towards window.*) You'll like to know Lady Gladys Valentine and Miss Fitzgeorge.

LANCELOT (R.C.). Thank you; it will be so hot there.

MARIAN (*trying another tack*). Lady Chelmer will be so sorry—shall I go up and see if she can possibly come down?

LANCELOT. Oh, please don't! It will increase her neuralgia.

MARIAN (*smiling resignedly*). Well, I've offered you several chances of not being bored. (*Crosses to Chesterfield and sits.*)

LANCELOT. I'm taking the best. (*Sits on chair R.C.*)

MARIAN. Oh, I'm sure I could not entertain a genius, except unawares—I've met one or two in town, and they are most difficult. I could almost wager that within ten minutes you will be saying or doing something extraordinary.

LANCELOT. Done!

MARIAN. Oh, I didn't mean it literally.

LANCELOT. But I do, what will you wager?

MARIAN. Oh, what ladies usually wager—a pair of gloves.

(LANCELOT starts.)

And I know I shall win. Take authors now. (*Rattling on to cover emotion.*) If you talk to them about themselves, they look daggers, and if you talk about their rivals, dynamite. But of all geniuses commend me to actors. I was introduced to a tragedian at Henley last year and when he saw a comedian punting a Princess, he—(*after rising, she holds up her hands.*) Oh! Do you know I often wish geniuses had a tail to lash!

LANCELOT (*springing up*). Mary Ann! (*Takes a step forward.*)

MARIAN (*freezingly—drawing back*). I beg your pardon!

LANCELOT. Forgive me. (*Passing hand over eyes.*) I am not myself to night—I fancied—

MARIAN. I told you you would lose the gloves. Let me take you to the billiard-room. (*Crosses to L.C. up.*)

LANCELOT. No—please—there, I am better, we were talking of geniuses.

MARIAN (*sits at piano*). And a rival one. Would you rather I talked about your opera?

LANCELOT. No, no. But wasn't it strange it should be called by your name?

MARIAN. Marian! Why, that's as common as Mary Ann! There are myriads of Marians.

LANCELOT. But only one for me.

MARIAN. Ah, your heroine is a reality.

LANCELOT. She was. My "Meadowsweet" is dedicated to her.

MARIAN. She is dead?

LANCELOT. I do not know. She went out of my life.

MARIAN. How strange! Just like Dick!

LANCELOT. Dick!

MARIAN (*at piano*). Just a memory you stirred! But I can't say I cared much for your living Maid Marian—I mean of course Signora Favella—she looked the part, but her upper register is so thin.

LANCELOT. Her upper register's not so bad; it was her not looking the part that I minded. But that would be too much to expect. I have never seen any one like my Maid Marian—except you.

MARIAN (*rises and goes to window—laughing nervously*). Except me! How ridiculous!

LANCELOT (*with passionate movement*). Yes, your eyes, your hair, your smile, the trick of your lips, the cadence of your voice—everything reminds me of her.

MARIAN (*turns with a sigh*). Oh dear! Geniuses are difficult to entertain.



LANCELOT. No, no. Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not flattering you.

MARIAN. Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Lancelot. I'm not at all flattered to resemble an operatic Maid Marian. I'd rather be plain Mary Ann.

LANCELOT. Mary Ann! I—I—yes, yes; I don't know what's the matter with me to-night. (*Sits on Chesterfield R.C., puts head on hands.*) Forgive me—I ought not to have come—I'm feeling so miserable. (*His attitude suggests similar scene in Act II.*)

MARIAN (*looks round—sees LADY CHELMER'S quill, seizes it and presents it to him, completing the suggestion of the above scene*). Then hadn't you better have your pen, Mr. Lancelot?

LANCELOT (*jumps up again*). You are Mary Ann!

MARIAN (*C.—retreats, drops pen; in strange defiant tones*). Yes, I am Mary Ann!

LANCELOT. Then I have found you at last!

MARIAN (*coldly*). No, you have found merely Marian.

LANCELOT. Ah, I realize that—but simply to see you again is rapture. I wish you every happiness.

MARIAN. Why?

LANCELOT. Are you free? Are you still Maid Marian? Free?

MARIAN. What is my freedom to you? I was free six years ago.

LANCELOT. But then I was not the Lancelot of to-day. What had I to offer in return for your gold?

MARIAN (*with tragic hauteur*). Your love, which was more to me than millions.

LANCELOT. Ah, I was mad—no, no, it was not your money—don't let me take credit for fine feelings—it was your menial station, it was the world's opinion, I was too miserably proud to marry you.

MARIAN. I did not seek to marry you.

LANCELOT. If I had only listened to my heart! But my pride trampled on it and broke it—I let you go—and yet you did not let me go, dear dream-child. Your innocence, your perfect faith, were the inspiration of my songs; when I was in gloom, you brought me my pen, when I repined against fate I remembered your cheerful drudgery. And now to find you again—to know you are free! Oh, can't you forgive?

MARIAN. Certainly. You've lost the gloves half a dozen times, but I let you off. (*Crosses up R.C.*)

LANCELOT. You give me mockery, not pity.

MARIAN (*back L.C.*). You said you didn't want my pity—you were a man and would pull through. Oh, yes, I remember your words—Pity! The world's opinion was so much to you—and have you not fame? "We artists only care for our art." And haven't you plenty of it to care for? Pity! My money loomed so large to you. And haven't you plenty of your own?

LANCELOT (*L.C.*). Fame, music, money—they are like the bag

of diamonds the thirsty Arab found in the desert. Love is all that counts.

MARIAN. Then surely *you* don't thirst for love. Did you not impress on me the universal adoration for Keeley Lesterre? How much more then for Lancelot! (*She moves down a little.*)

LANCELOT (*moving B.C.*). Yes, I will not lie to you. It is the tragedy of the artist to be drawn to beauty as the moth to the flame, but for me the flame was always dull and smoky by the side of your white fire. Oh, your purity, Mary Ann! You don't know how it has brought into my life the clearness of skies at dawn—the love you offered me so recklessly in your girlish innocence has been to me whiter than the first buds of spring—Ah, I tried to put it all into my "Pastoral Reverie," but how short I fell!

MARIAN. Ah, no. "Meadowsweet" is divine!

LANCELOT (*joyfully*). You know it? I ought to have called it not "Meadowsweet"—merely "Mary Ann"! And so, do you wonder, though I saw lovely faces enough, never could I find that perfect trust, that lovely innocence which flowered in your soul alone, like some marvellous blossom that flowers but once in a century.

MARIAN (*overcome—sits on the Chesterfield*). That trust, that innocence . . . are dead.

LANCELOT (*c.*). Don't say that, Mary Ann.

MARIAN. Dead. . . . And Dick?

LANCELOT. Dead.

MARIAN. Poor Dick! (*Buries her face in hands.*)

LANCELOT. Oh, I loved it. Was it not the last link between us? I fed it myself. I gave it seed, biscuits—I was most careful not to give it marmalade.

MARIAN (*half laughing—half crying*). Poor Mr. Lancelot! I do not blame you. But you see they have only such brief lives. Faith and innocence and all the little joyous birds that sing within us and flutter against the cage of our hearts. Poor Innocence! Poor Faith! Poor Dick!

LANCELOT. And I have killed them all.

MARIAN (*wearily*). No—not Dick! And perhaps the others too died of age. One cannot live in a world like this and keep one's illusions. (*Rises.*) Oh, Lancelot, why did I not die too! (*Crosses to L.C.*)

LANCELOT. Ah, you love me, you love me still!

MARIAN. No, nothing sings at my heart any more.

LANCELOT. Ah, let me try! (*As if to embrace her.*)

MARIAN. Too late! Why does everything in life come too late? Money—Love—

LANCELOT (*bowing his head*). Fame—Repentance—

MARIAN. Yes, it is a sad world—and I am so tired. Good night.

LANCELOT (*terrified*). But not good-bye?

MARIAN. Yes, it is better so. (*Is about to ring the bell.*)

LANCELOT (*springs at her and holds her to him*). No, no, you shall not go! I cannot let you go!

MARIAN (*struggling*). You must! You must!

LANCELOT. But I love you. Dearest, be my wife and——

MARIAN. You are to let me go.

LANCELOT (*releasing her and staggering back—a pause. Then, with attitudes and positions exactly the reverse of those in Act III., he drooping and she dignified*). Can't you marry me?

MARIAN. It is impossible.

LANCELOT. Why is it impossible?

MARIAN. Because—because—oh, it's impossible. (*Makes a hopeless gesture and totters out through the door.*)

(*LANCELOT looks after her stonily, then drops brokenly on to the music stool. After a while his hands begin to touch the keys softly. And gradually he glides into the chorus, played very pathetically, of "Good-night and Good-bye." As he finishes there is a knock at the door.*)

LANCELOT (*without turning head*). Yes, old fellow, I'm here. (*Stops playing.*)

(*Enter MARY ANN in her old cap and apron, pulling on her gloves.*)

LANCELOT becomes aware of her and turns on stool.)

LANCELOT. Mary Ann!

MARY ANN. Yessir. (*Cheerfully smiling through tears.*)

(*LANCELOT stands.*)

The birds at my heart started singing—— (*Pause.*) And so I came back!

LANCELOT. But you said your love was dead, you could not marry me.

MARY ANN. That was Marian, sir. This is merely Mary Ann—— (*Falls into his arms.*)

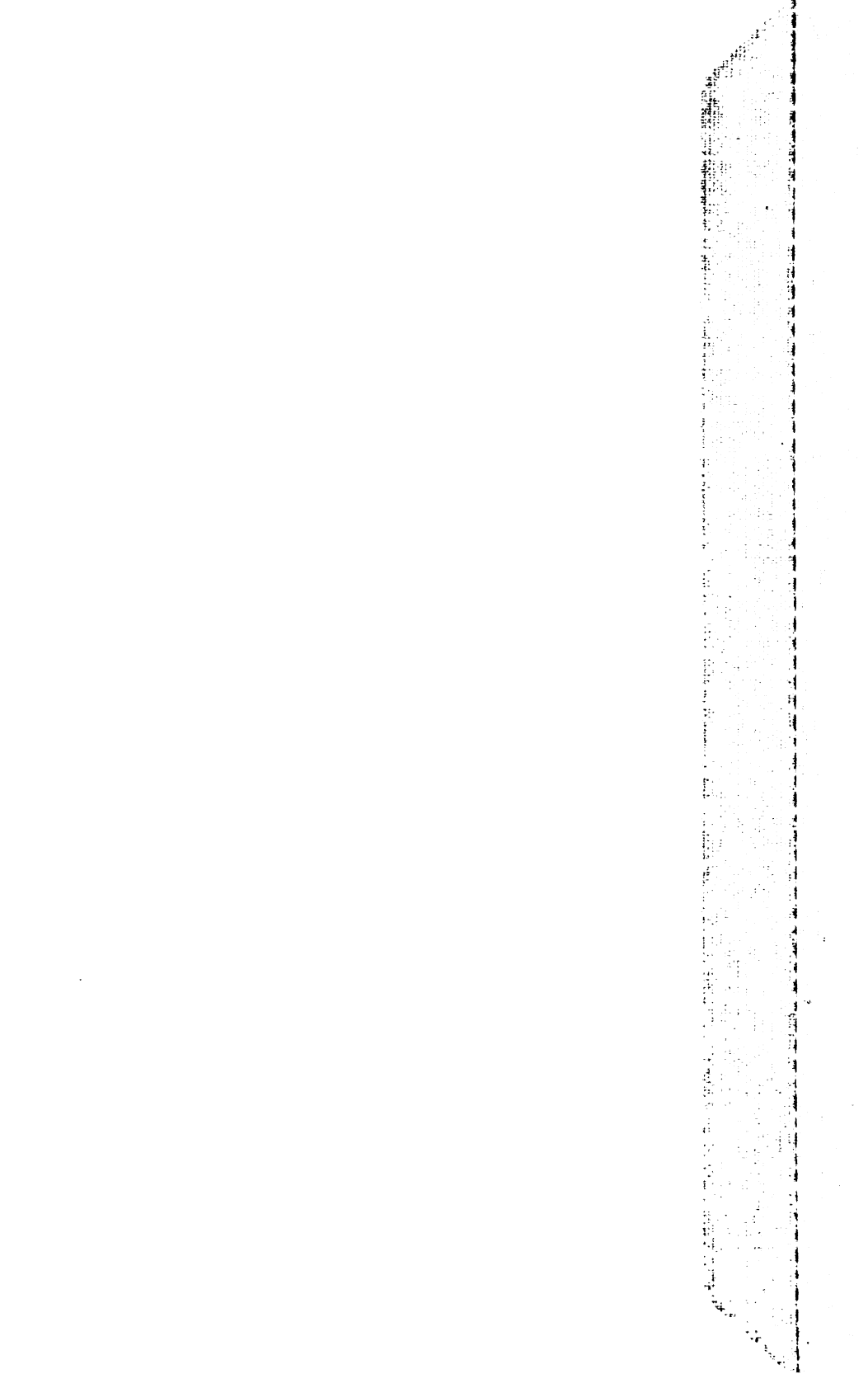
(*Music: "Kiss me Good-night" in orchestra, strings and reed only.*)

CURTAIN.









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